

Instagram, Social Media, and the “Like”: Exploring Virtual Identity’s Role in
21st Century Students’ New Socialization Experience

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Abstract

Personal technologies and social media use have changed the socialization experience of our 21st century learners. As learners have a new, embodied, *virtual identity* that is an omnipresent force within their social interactions, this study sought to examine how virtual identity influences student relationships both within and outside of a school context. This study also explored how personal technologies and social media use have influenced learners' perceptions of their own 21st century learning. Using a qualitative inquiry, purposeful sampling was employed to recruit 6 participants between the ages of 15 to 19 to examine their social networking site use and education experience. Data were collected from single, one-on-one semi-structured interviews in which participants discussed their experiences using social media. Data were also collected from the teens' personal Instagram accounts, and a personal reflexive researcher's journal was kept for triangulation of data. Open and axial coding strategies alongside constant comparative methods were used to analyze data. Participants shared how they and their peers use social media, the pressures and expectations from other users, social media's influence on peer relationships, and how social media influences their choices in the physical realm. All 6 participants explained that their teachers do not talk to them about their social media use, and even offered critiques of the school system itself and its inability to prepare students for the new realities of a digital world. This study concludes that while social media is very influential on students' socialization, educators should be more concerned about the lack of guidance and support that students receive in school in terms of appropriate social media use and the navigation of virtual identity.

Acknowledgements

Captains Log, Stardate 70438.3

I didn't think this day would ever come, but it is finally time for me to leave my crew aboard the S.C.C. Enterprise and venture into the uncharted territory of the future. My 7-year mission as part of the Brock fleet has almost ended, and I must say my time here seemed to have passed me by with the speed of warp factor 10.

I've received first class training, conducted rigorous research, and travelled to unparalleled destinations as an ambassador of the fleet. But, a captain is truly nothing without her crew, and I have had some outstanding officers, yeoman, lieutenants, and captains that have served me well over the years and to whom I must show my unwavering respect and gratitude.

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Well, my destiny awaits, and soon I will boldly go where no man, woman, and any other gender situated on the spectrum has gone before. I owe my arrival to the next part of the journey to you all. This will be my last entry as part of the Brock fleet, and I must say, it's been quite the ride.

Live long my friends, and prosper.

Steady as she goes.

Code out.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

My B.Ed year was a whirlwind of new insights derived from educational praxis, and my practicum experiences with students have inspired me to interrogate thoroughly my previously held beliefs about teaching and learning in the 21st century. Specifically, my interactions with learners drove me to reconcile traditional concepts of knowledge and the 21st century student's new personal technologies. The student body I saw is now instantly and virtually connected to one another through their new devices and social media use, and I wondered if this connectivity has changed the ways in which they relate to each other in the school context. As many students are social media users, I now struggle with how the embedded structures of social media sites are seemingly rooted in the desire for users to share their life and connect with each other, and what this means for classroom practice. I wonder how the need for sharing and connection influences the ways in which virtual identity and connection to virtual worlds manifest within the classroom. If this connectivity means that students have instant access to bodies of information as well as each other, how does that change the content of what we teach in schools and not just the methods of delivery?

One of the most critical learning moments on 21st century pedagogy came from my second teaching practicum where I taught grade 12 applied English. During one of the lessons, I shared that I had gone to see one of my favourite bands in Toronto on the weekend. My class of grade 12s then asked to see a picture of the band and of me at the show. Cell phones were banned in the classroom and I said no, and one of my students jokingly said, "Fine! I don't believe you went." I looked at her with a puzzled expression on my face, and then made a joke about how hard it will be for me

to carry on in my life after losing the approval of a 17 year old. The class laughed and so did she and then another student replied, “You’ve gotta show us the picture, Miss Code. Pictures or it didn’t happen!”

“Pictures or it didn’t happen” became a mantra that I would joke about with my second, and then third practicum classes. I had thought the phrase was an original idea coined by my students, but I soon learned that this phrase was something commonly said amongst many social media users and was even a popular phrase for online memes; memes are virtual images with text that provide humorous commentary on cultural or political issues (Gill, 2015). On my third placement, a group of grade 9 boys loved this saying and brought it up any chance they could. I remember one afternoon they were doing group work, and as I was walking around to check on their groups there was one student who was off task and bragging about how he went Egypt when he was little. I said, “You went to Egypt? Darius, pictures or it didn’t happen,” and his entire group erupted into laughter. One student added “Yeah Darius, now that I think about it, I’ve never seen any pictures from this trip,” to which Darius added “Dude, you know my whole family is from there, quit it.”

“Pictures or it didn’t happen” has influenced my discursive practices and pedagogy by sparking an interest in how personal technologies such as cell phones and iPads have fused with social networking site (SNS) use to then create new technological practices of the 21st century learner. Social media does provide a venue for validating one’s claims with photos, but more importantly it encourages the sharing of details from one’s daily life. SNS use supports the sharing of any and all information, especially with the act of taking and sharing a picture. This emphasis on

pictures and picture taking can change how people remember moments in their lives.

Professor and psychologist David Kahneman (2010) explains that how people choose to remember happiness is always split between the “remembering self” and the “experiencing self,” but today new technological practices have changed how people experience happiness (para. 2). Typically, the experiencing self is influenced by the current experiences in one’s life while the remembering self is how one chooses to remember the said experience later, and most people are influenced more by their remembering self than the experiencing self (Kahneman, 2010). However, with the frequency and popularity of sharing pictures through SNS use, our current generation of social media users now experience moments in their life with what Kahneman calls an “anticipated memory” of what the individual will want the moment to feel like later (para. 10). With the emphasis presently placed on pictures, students are not necessarily present in the activity, but are removed from the moment and experience it with the purpose of taking a photo (Silva, 2014). In these moments, the individual’s remembering self and the experiencing self work together, thereby allowing the individual greater freedom to choose which moments should be captured and consequently how the moments will be remembered (Butler, 2014); the working together of these two selves does not have to be seen as a necessarily negative or positive concept (Silva, 2014). By taking the photo, individuals are then able to affect their remembering self by choosing what feelings these moments will elicit when later reflected on and shared. These users can regulate how they want to present the moments in their life through pictures, and how they want moments in their life to be remembered and then seen by others (Silva, 2014).

With the emphasis that is placed on pictures in the 21st century, how does anticipated memory influence the lives of the current generation of learners? Part of this research explores how students perform their virtual identities through their pictures, and the values and importance their demographic places on the picture. “Pictures or it didn’t happen” is a mantra that embodies this generation’s access to information and desire to share their captured experience with others, and also frames pictures as the virtual building blocks of 21st century identity.

The reliance on interpreting and analyzing pictures as important sources of information testifies to how the foundations of formal knowledge are changing. The transformative impact created by the access to virtual worlds has transcends all realms of life and is crucial to the schooling sphere. Digital media and instant access to information have also shifted how the students interact with the curriculum and should shatter all previously held notions of ubiquitous knowledge in schools. Knowledge is no longer a discrete body of information that is disseminated by the teacher and textbook; rather, it is now shared and is ever expanding in the virtual worlds that these students access.

Background to the Problem

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land, and don’t criticize what you can’t understand. Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command, your old road is rapidly agin’. Please get out of the new one if you can’t lend your hand, for the times they are a-changin’. (Dylan, 1964, para. 4)

In 2015, the new realities of our Digital Age have caused a radical shift in the execution of social exchanges among individuals in society, changing the role that

major agents of socialization now play in the 21st century (Code, 2015). This paradigm deviation is best illustrated by the role of educational institutions, which are highly regarded to be one of the most meaningful agents of socialization for young people (Coleman, 1992; Hughes, 2011; Morrison & McIntyre, 1971). Historically, the socialization function of institutions has involved transferring the dominant ideologies of one's culture, teaching societal norms and customs, and modeling appropriate social conduct (Bourdieu, 1964; Grusec & Hastings, 2007); however, our 21st century learners have adapted new technological practices that could potentially rewrite these traditional views on socialization within institutions.

At present, the generation of learners in schools are considered “connected learners,” a term that defines how learners use technology to engage in the formal, informal, and social modalities that comprise their learning spaces (Pontefract, 2011b); this generation is also referred to as Millennials or Generation Y (Verčič & Verčič, 2013). Although not only a crucial element of these connected learners' educational experience, technology has also shaped their socialization both in and out of schools (Downes, 2005). The learners who are in schools have grown up with the ability, and also the expectation, of instant connection with each other at all times which is possible through such technology as cell phones, instant messaging, and online SNSs (Turkle, 2011). This generation experiences purposeful and serious social interactions in the digital realm; therefore these learners have had to manage their socialization in the two divergent channels of the physical space and the virtual space (Hilsen & Helvik, 2014). Navigation of the two different realms is one of the many traits exclusive to connected learners' socialization experience. In fact, the

accessibility and frequency of these social exchanges in the virtual realm have inevitably changed the dynamics of how these students socialize in the physical spaces of the school (boyd, 2014). Their interactions are now shaped by their ability to communicate via text messaging and SNSs at school through their identity that emerges online from this technology use.

Today, our current students encompass a physical identity, but also personify a new embodied *virtual identity*; that is, an omnipresent force within these students' social interactions both in and out of school (Baldwin & Achterber, 2013; Code, 2015; Seery, 2010; Turkle, 2011). This virtual identity is a direct result of how students portray themselves online as they are building, creating, and performing their identity through their social media profiles in order to socialize in the virtual spaces that connect to other users (boyd, 2007; Mallan, 2009). It was once thought that virtual identities had a distinct and separate existence from physical identity, but recent studies and literature suggest that virtual identities are in fact part of the physical identity (boyd, 2014; Jerry & Tavares-Jones, 2012). New data from the PEW Research Center show that 92% of teenagers ages 13 to 17 report going online daily, and that 89% of teenagers use some kind of social media (Lenhart, 2015). The data show how frequent social media use is popular and widespread among teens, and students network through virtual identities by sharing pictures and knowledge about their life and the world around them. These virtual connections undoubtedly influence how they relate to each other in schools, thus social media needs to be addressed as a new and influential venue where valuable interactions are taking place.

Personal technology has influenced socialization, and new research suggests that with the high frequency of social media and cell phone use, basic brain chemistry is also changing to further illustrate the depth and scope of society's technology use (Droui, Kaiser, & Miller, 2012). Brains are now rewiring themselves in a way that causes users to experience false sensations of cell phone vibrations when their phones are not actually vibrating or ringing at all (Droui et al., 2012; Moffit & Brown, 2014). A study conducted by Drouin et al. (2012) of Indiana University found that of their 290 undergraduate student sample, an overwhelming rate of 89% experienced these false vibrations and noticed it "once every two weeks on average" (p. 1490). This sensation called "phantom vibration syndrome" results from a "misinterpretation of sensory stimuli" or a "tactile hallucination" of the phone vibrating or ringing (p. 1491). The brains of cell phone users can now interpret an irritation like an itch as a false vibration from a phone, which means that technology has "begun to rewire our nervous system" in never before seen ways (Moffit & Brown, 2014).

Socialization, brain chemistry, and virtual identities are just a few examples of how learners are influenced by technology. Unfortunately, current models of education can neglect these changes and therefore ignore key pieces of 21st century identity; our students now have multiple identities that are influenced by personal technology use such as SNS access. Educational institutions "can no longer rely on a stable, or even singular, notion of self" (Seery, 2010, p. 65) possessed by their learners, as these students are now living and performing their selves in boundless, virtual contexts of the digital world. All displays of identity are a social performance as we choose how we portray ourselves to other people through our body gestures,

our appearance, and how we behave around others (Butler, 1988, 1990; Goffman, 1959). Now, technology provides many unique opportunities for students to present and perform their identity in different ways through their virtual performances.

Justification for the Research Problem

Students use digital mediums to express themselves, connect with each other, and share information in ways that are not reflected in the class when activities isolate the learners from each other or from their technology (Gardner & Davis, 2013). This section is split up into five different parts to first reveal how virtual identities and technologies work together to place new pressures on the teacher to student relationship, and then explore how virtual identities have changed the relationship that the student has to the curriculum is to the traditional learning spaces of the school, and lastly changed how students relate to their peers. A discussion on the popular SNS Instagram concludes this section.

The 21st Century Teacher–Student Connection

George Siemens (2005) suggests a theory of “connectivism” to respond to the rapidly changing learning frontier, as different skills are now needed to navigate the “nebulous environments” that learners occupy (p. 4). Connectivism includes the necessity for learners to uncover connections between ideas, concepts, and fields, and have the most accurate and up to date knowledge in their lessons (Siemens, 2005, 2009). With connectivism, students are continually connected to virtual sources of knowledge and utilize these sources for classroom projects and activities (Siemens, 2009). Siemens’s work on connectivism as a type of learning complements Dan Pontefract’s (2011b) writings on connected learners, as both scholars understand that

learning occurs in multiple, undefined environments. Connectivism facilitates learning by giving students access to the unlimited knowledge that exist in virtual networks outside of the classroom (Siemens, 2009). This approach challenges the traditional restrictions placed on knowledge in the classroom, as learning occurs online within technologically enhanced or social networks that students are connected to during classroom practice (Siemens, 2009). Informal learning becomes a significant part of the learning experience, and as the learners are continually connected to concepts and people, education is in no way limited to the four walls of the classrooms (Downes, 2005; Pontefract, 2011b); the possibilities of what the students can learn whilst connected to online networks are endless. Connectivism in the classroom marks a shift in how educators understand students' relationship with knowledge and with each other. Teachers who approach classroom practice with a connectivist lens understand that students are continually connected to networks of people outside of the classroom, and that reality should also be reflected in the classroom.

Using a connectivist lens to examine education also changes the traditional relationship that the teacher and learner have to formal knowledge and information in the classroom. The teacher no longer holds monopoly over all of the knowledge and facts in the learning space, as students can now access worlds of knowledge right at their fingertips while in class (Downes, 2005; Pontefract, 2011b). Students are connected to outside sources of knowledge in the classroom and can look up any important dates or details of historical events in a few seconds (Siemens, 2009). This raises questions as to what content teachers should consider significant knowledge for

students to learn when the students have access to limitless bodies of information through their personal technologies. In order to address what knowledge should be taught in schools, it is important to examine the types of knowledge that connected learners are creating themselves. Students now have a unique ability to utilize their online connections to create and learn from a shared “crowdsourced” type of knowledge (Howe, 2006).

Crowdsourcing is the process of collaborating with others usually utilizing online communities to generate solutions to a problem or to share knowledge (Howe, 2006; Salter, 2013). Outside the classroom, students are used to sharing information with each other and collaborating via such outlets as social media. As our learners are more connected both to each other and to knowledge available online they have the potential to crowdsource and share information every day in their life.

Traditional classrooms isolate students from each other and the learners sit at their individual desks, work individually, and learn individually. However, this separation and singular notion of knowledge is no longer the reality of the crowdsourced and shared world that students live in. When students work together and crowdsource ideas online, they bring a bigger repertoire of experiences and knowledge and understand the efficiency of working collectively as opposed to singularly. Regrettably, the conventional classroom does not always reflect the worlds that these learners are connected to which could strain and test the teacher to student relationship.

The New Relationship to 21st Century Literacy

There has been a long-established discourse on “literacy” that is strictly

limited to the teaching of the so-called three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Guo, Cope, & Kalantzis, 2009); however, counter discourses, such as the work of the New London Group (1996) have challenged this binary notion of literacy for decades. The New London Group suggest the implementation of “multiliteracies” in the classroom, which includes the traditional written literacy while expanding to cover tactile, gestural, oral, spatial, audio, and visual literacies in the classroom (p. 80). These modes challenge the learner and offer transferable and valuable skills that can better respond to the social, cultural, economic, and technological needs of the learners in pedagogical practice (Yelland, Cope, & Kalantzis, 2008).

Today in our digital age, innovative concepts of literacy are shifting further to encompass new multimodal digital literacies to meet the needs of our connected learners (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Multimodal literacies include discourses and texts “that traverse space and time on screens” and include the images, videos, and sounds that are accessible through the use of new technology and digital media (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). These new mediums for sharing information manifest Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) famous mantra for contemporary communication as he believed “the medium is the message,” as the mediums are the “extension” of one’s self that should be examined (p. 15). In a series of images from his book *The Medium is the Message*, McLuhan explains this further by concluding that “the wheel is an extension of the foot” and that clothing “is an extension of the skin” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, pp. 32, 39). He writes that mediums control and influence their message, and also that the content of a medium “is always another medium” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 16). The medium actually determines the content of the message because it has

shaped and controlled what is to be delivered, and too often we are distracted by the content of the medium rather than examining the medium itself (McLuhan, 1964). Thus McLuhan concluded that the medium is more interesting and important than the message, and it is the medium that changes society rather than the content; consequently it is the medium and the effect that the medium has on society that should be interrogated over the content the medium provides. McLuhan believes that content is also shaped by the “cultural matrix” to which the specific medium functions, and warns that society is not as prepared to “encounter radio and TV in our literate milieu” because we cannot truly read these mediums and consider their contexts and their effects on society (pp. 18, 25). Unless society can become fully literate of mediums and their contexts, we run the risk of becoming “numb in our new electric world” (p. 25), and this literacy should start in the classroom.

We are experiencing a “seismic shift” in the media that the world uses to communicate (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 3), and with the realities and connectedness that globalization brings, we need to include these new media in pedagogical practice to educate for global citizens. As McLuhan advises, we also need to examine the effects that these new mediums are having on our students and on society as a whole so that we can make more informed pedagogical choices based on our students’ needs. Many teachers are connected learners too, and they can incorporate new digital mediums into classroom practice to prepare their students for articulating themselves through these new venues and understanding the impacts that communication using these mediums have. However, McLuhan wrote that society, when faced with a new situation or challenge, often views the present through a “rear-

view mirror” that only reflects the past (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 73). His work on the rear-view mirror cautions that we might not always be in a position to understand the theoretical implications of the new shifts in communication theory as we “attach ourselves ... to the most recent past” and “march backwards into the future” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 73). It will be important for teachers to make an effort to understand how media and communication are continually evolving and then execute these shifts in the classroom. Teachers will ideally be media literate themselves in order to teach it to their students and prepare students to interrogate the new mediums thoroughly as they arise and evaluate their impact.

One way that teachers can implement new literacies that teach for virtual identity into their classes is to adopt an “intentional pedagogy of digital rhetoric” that emphasizes the importance of citizenship, ownership, teamwork, and interactivity amongst its students (Clark, 2010, p. 27). Scholar Elizabeth Clark writes that the “traditional essayistic literacy” is outdated and outmoded. She explains that what the students write “has the potential to become public” with the use of personal technologies and the Internet, therefore educators should redesign their pedagogies while keeping in mind these new technologies that are changing professional and personal lives (p. 28). She recognizes that online media are continually changing, and believes the curriculum should engage students in “analyzing digital media, in exploring the world beyond the classroom, in crafting digital personae, and in creating new and emerging definitions of civic literacy” (p. 28). Ideally, education should produce critical and innovative thinkers who are *literate* and that can thrive in the new realities of our world.

The New Spatial Practices of the 21st Century Learner

A semiotic analysis of 21st century schools reveals the importance for educators to understand the 21st century customs and practices of their students as our learners have a new relationship to the physical school space that is influenced by the new signs and signifiers of technology (Peirce, 1931); these new signifiers are an extension of the students' virtual identities. Michel de Certeau's (1984) analysis of everyday spatial practices can be applied to school spaces as he outlines that individuals write "text" with their bodies through their movements within a space (p. 93). The infrastructure of the space influences how the pedestrians move and thus affects their pathway and their "spatial text," turning the individual's pathway into an invisible story (de Certeau, 1984). The individual is unconsciously interpreting the predetermined signifiers of public space such as road signs, sidewalk space, and the architecture of the buildings, which are carefully chosen by the authoritative powers of the city and city planners; this turns the daily practice of walking in public into a "spatial acting out of the place" through the individuals conduct in that space (de Certeau, 1984, p. 98).

Similar to inhabiting public streets, the practice of writing spatial text in the bordered spaces that comprise school territory have always been affected by the secluded confines of the physical building and property. A major part of the students' socialization experience while at school involves how their behaviour is shaped while occupying school space. The text the students write in the hallways and classrooms is informed by their unconscious interpretation of predetermined signifiers (de Certeau, 1984), such as the desks of a classroom or the arrangement of the lockers within these

bordered spaces. The physical layout of the school molds their conduct, shapes the paths these students take, and influences how they socialize and act out the space with one another. However, with the advances in technology, the socialization among current students is no longer exclusively influenced by the isolated spaces of school property.

In the 21st century school, students' social experiences are now heavily influenced by the technology that they use to perform their virtual identity and access to new limitless virtual spaces. These learners have a new corporeal relationship to the school space due to the wireless connections provided by their cellular phones, iPads, tablets, laptops, and gaming systems, affecting how they navigate and act out their interpretations of the space. They are connected to new virtual spaces and can socialize in these contexts, which transforms contemporary ideas of presence and sense of space in the school building (Doueiri, 2011). They also have access to outside knowledge in ways previous generations have not, which shapes how they interact with each other and with the content of the class. This access to information changes how knowledge is filtered, constructed, and shared amongst students, which also changes the types of knowledge that we should value in school.

Gaston Bachelard (1964) uses phenomenology to examine how people approach spaces, and the qualities that are then projected onto intimate spaces such as the home. He argues that the individual can "write a house" through his/her description of it, and consequently can "read a house" (p. 14) through a retelling or account of the space. In his analysis of household descriptions, such as those from Baudelaire's *Curiosités esthétiques*, Bachelard deduced that explanations of homes were actually narrative stories that revealed qualities about the individual's own

experience with their home spaces. He calls this approach “topoanalysis,” meaning the “psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (p. 8); thus, on the surface of a topoanalytical approach to 21st century schools, it is evident that new stories are being written and told about school spaces via new technology. Our learners are *writing* the classrooms and spaces with their text messages, pictures, and dialogues happening in the virtual realms, which is influencing how the students phenomenologically experience the spaces.

As virtual identities are incorporated into classroom practice, students will have the opportunity to write and share stories about their own learning spaces through their virtual venues. Their pictures and messages could help them write positive stories and influence their relationship with the space so that they will read the entire school space in a constructive way. Bachelard (1964) also writes that a space can influence a collection of “organic habits” that the body develops while traversing the space, and these movements become habits that are “physically inscribed in us” over time (p. 14). Therefore, if or when the school space rejects the use of technology, these students develop physical habits such as movements or gestures to hide their technology, which fester in their body and could negatively shape how they move around in these spaces.

Technology is changing how the 21st century student writes his/her spatial story, and could influence the values that the learners project onto the spaces as they read and write the space with their personal electronics.

New Forms of Social Capital in 21st Century Schools

The technology that learners access each day is creating new spaces for

socialization, which is also creating new forms of “social capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245) that could influence 21st century classroom dynamics. Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as the accumulation of “actual or potential resources” that link the individual to a larger network of people (p. 245), and this has traditionally been seen in schools through the group of friends that students have and the hegemonic social status attributed to each group. Social capital involves the recognition of “the network of connections [the individual] can effectively mobilize” and also the volume of capital then possessed by those with whom s/he has those connections (p. 246). Thus, social capital is manifest through the social recognition aggregated through the students’ interactions with each other, which is judged through the social performance of the individual’s identity by his/her peers. Essentially, networked students are *richer* than their non-networked peers in that they have more social capital. However, technology is providing new spaces in which our 21st century students are performing their identity to attain status and is thus changing the ways that students are acquiring this social capital in schools.

There is a new social capital that materializes in the virtual world through the ways in which students present themselves through their profiles and navigate their online interactions with others. A small amount of research has referred to this as social capital in the virtual world, but these studies focus on Role Playing Games (RPGs) or Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) and do not address this social capital and its relationship to social media. These studies do not account for the real world implications that SNSs have for students, as they cannot account for how students present themselves online to their entire network of peers and the effects this

has on their socialization experience. For the purpose of this thesis I will be specifically referring to social capital created on social media as *virtual social capital* as I feel there needs to be direct terminology used to give value to the relationships among users and their profiles in these spaces. Chapter 5 will refine the definition and criteria for virtual social capital based on the participants' responses, and until then this term will be used to describe a social media user's connection to other social media profiles that is usually displayed through the virtual social status of one's account. In the same way students can collect social and cultural capital, and also social status through their peer interactions in school, they can also collect status in the virtual world in the form of followers and likes on such SNSs as Instagram and Facebook. Virtual social status's influence on virtual social capital is thoroughly explained in chapter 5 and it is what separates the above definition from other studies on social capital in virtual worlds.

What Is Instagram?

This research provides teachers with the opportunity to learn how the phenomena of virtual identities, Instagram use, and overall socialization in the virtual world influence the shared learning communities of their students. Instagram is examined for the purposes of this project as it is now passing Facebook as the most popular SNS among teens today (Luckerson, 2013; Rafter, 2013; Stern, 2013; Van Grove, 2013). Many critics have concluded that Facebook is "losing its youth appeal," and the popularity of Instagram has recently surpassed the popular SNS Twitter with 300 million users monthly (Sloane, 2014, para 4). Citigroup has recently come out and said that as of December 2014, Instagram is now worth \$35 billion, which is 49 times

the amount that Facebook purchased it for in 2012 (Berkowitz, 2014; Souppouris, 2014).

It is also worth noting that president Obama mentioned Instagram in his 2015 State of the Union Address, to which he wished astronaut Scott Kelly good luck in his upcoming mission to space and said “make sure to Instagram it” to the entire nation (as cited in Kremer, 2015, para. 8; Payne, 2015). Instagram is a SNS that is based around photo-sharing as participants upload their pictures and short videos with captions, comments, and the newly invented *hashtags*; hashtags are words or phrases that are chosen to categorize the picture that can also act as a link to other images that have been described with the same words; hashtags also begin their words or phrases with a number sign (#). This SNS is proving to be both popular and influential among social media users, and its presence in the lives of connected learners is addressed in the research. Figures 1 to 4 show what an Instagram profile looks like to better understand the interface for those who are unfamiliar with the medium. Instagram has its own Instagram account that showcases the myriad of unique photos that are posted and shared by its users, and this official account will be the exemplary account.

Statement of the Problem Situation

This study sought to examine how 21st century learners perform their identity through SNSs such as Instagram and Facebook, and investigate how their online performances of virtual identity manifest to influence the synergy and socialization of the physical classroom setting and overall school space. I uncover how these new ways of virtually socializing influence students’ socialization and their choices made in these learning spaces. I also investigate how the new realities of our digital world shape concepts of formal knowledge in the 21st century classroom.

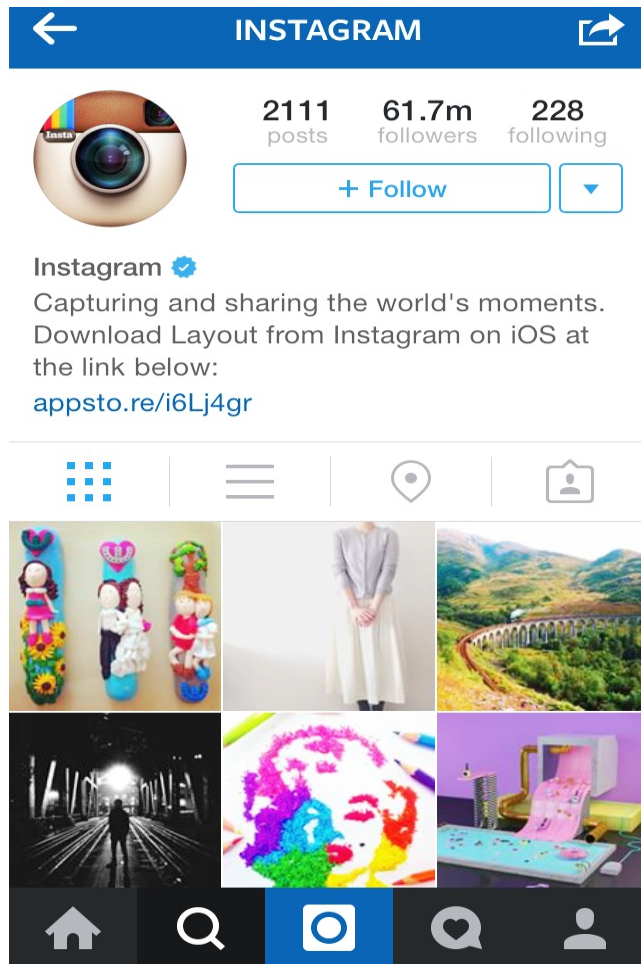


Figure 1. Instagram profile interface. User profiles are formatted to display biography, circular profile photo, number of posts, and users' follower/ following count. The "+ Follow" option permits users to follow other users and stay updated on latter's posted content.

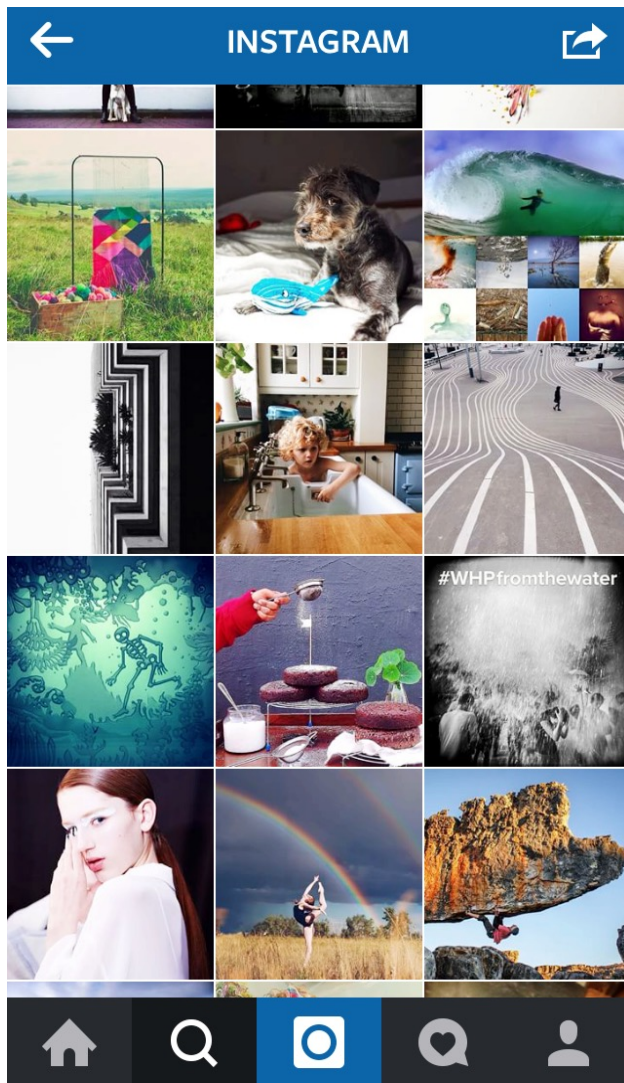


Figure 2. Profile content. As viewers scroll down the profile, all profile photos appear together; viewers have the option to click on any photo to take a closer look.



Figure 3. Instagram’s photo content. Clicking on a photo displays a larger version of the photo as well as how many people have “liked” the photo, the photo’s caption, and comments appended below the caption. Users have the option to also like the photo, leave a comment, or read previously posted comments.

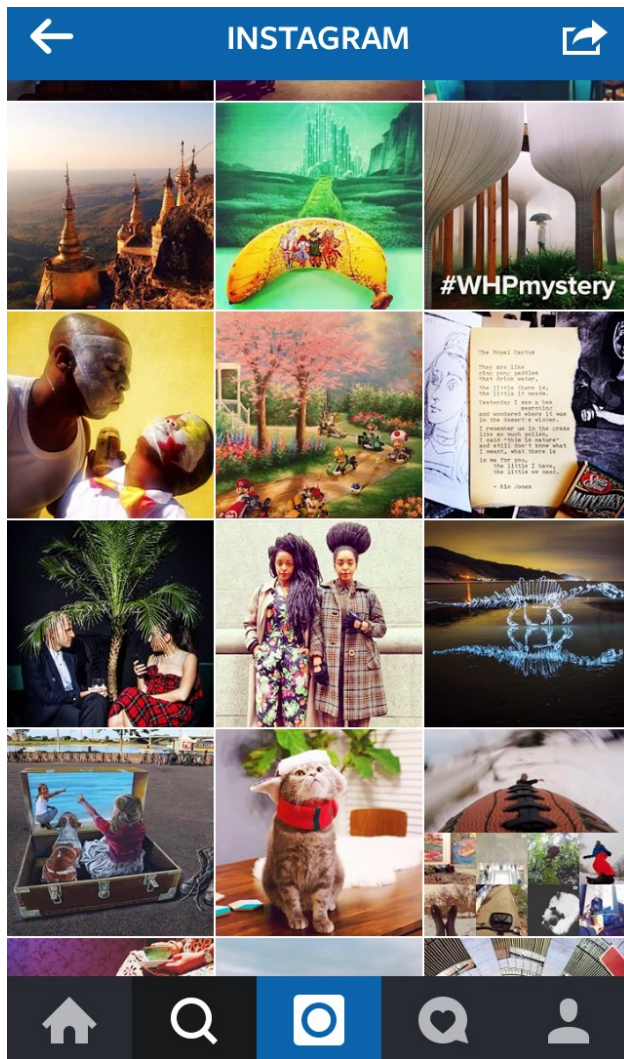


Figure 4. Navigational tools. Five icons remain at the bottom of each page and never leave the screen. The icons represent the home page, explore page, posting page, notification page, and user's profile page; these are the basic navigational tools for Instagram.

In order to address the study's research problem, the following questions were asked

1. How do performances of virtual identity influence the ways in which students communicate, relate to, and understand each other both in and out of the classroom?
2. What are students' attitudes toward virtual social capital, and does this affect peer relationships?
3. How have digital mediums and virtual identities influenced students' perceptions of schooling in the 21st century?

Rationale for the Problem

The 21st century learner has a unique relationship with technology, which has ruptured previously held ideologies about the student demographic including their connection to information and to each other. This research on virtual identities is important because it offers insight into how this phenomenon is influencing these students while at school, and could help inform classroom practice. Those from a non-social media or non-technology using background might not understand the impact of technology use in the classroom, and this research project is for any individuals from any background who want to learn more about 21st century pedagogy. Although many teachers are connected learners themselves, this project could enrich their knowledge of virtual social practices by providing such insight into students' virtual lives as explaining how students feel about social media, and examining if SNSs influence students' opinions of school. These data have the potential to inform educators' classroom practices and could provide both technology

using and non-technology using teachers with new perspectives on social media, and the use of technology with respect to virtual identity in the classroom. Data could also shed light on how students use SNSs and other online platforms to create shared communities, and determine if these shared communities should be recreated in the school sphere. It could also help inform how teachers handle classroom management issues by providing a deeper understanding of the significance that virtual interactions have in the overall socialization experience of the 21st century student.

Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu's (1986) *The Forms of Capital* will lay a foundation when constructing a definition and criteria for virtual social capital amongst 21st century learners. Additionally, chapter 5 uses Marshall McLuhan's (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* and McLuhan and Fiore's (1967) *The Medium is the Massage* as philosophical anchors to guide the discussion section and to help answer the research questions. McLuhan's innovative work helps the discussion highlight the corporeal effects of social media as expressed by the participants. Louis Althusser's (1971) Ideological State Apparatus theory is also be used when examining social media as an ideology that influences students. Althusser draws on Marxist traditions of (repressive) State Apparatuses to discuss how ideologies are made material through the actions of its subjects and I construct model subject of this ideology based on participants' responses. Lastly, terminology from Erving Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is employed to discuss identities as performances, as he uses a dramaturgical framework to explain the ways in which one performs his or her identity. Collectively, these data will help inform teachers of the

current values that students place on social media, and help to explain how social media is an omnipresent force in the 21st century student's daily interactions.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the virtual identity phenomena. To provide an in-depth analysis, the experience of 21st century performances is divided into three distinct parts: education in the 21st century, virtual identities, and identities as performances. The chapter examines terminological discourse surrounding the connected learner generation, examines studies that both support and deny that virtual identities can be truthful performances, and investigates a framework commonly used to assess identities as performances. Chapter 3 will present the qualitative methodology used for this study and will outline the research design, a justification for choosing qualitative research, data collection, data analysis, efforts taken to establish trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. Information on the site and participants will also be included. Chapter 4 provides the presentation of the findings, and chapter 5 presents a summary and discussion of the findings and also discusses implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In addressing the complexities of virtual performativity and the 21st century student, this literature review is divided into three themes: (a) education in the 21st century, (b) virtual identity and performativity, and (c) identities as performances.

Education in the 21st Century

Some teachers bemoan current students' capabilities, compared to students of the past. But there is another way to see students, a better, more positive way for the 21st century. We too often treat kids as if they were still (using a 19th century metaphor) trains on a track when actually today's kids are a lot more like rockets. ... Which, by the way, makes educators (again metaphorically) rocket scientists! (Who knew?). (Prensky, 2010, p. 11)

Digital Discourses

Many preconceived notions of students and established pedagogical practices have been transformed due to the technology of the 21st century. The upcoming generation—unlike any preceding generation—has unprecedented access to the pulse of the world. Don Tapscott (2009) coined the term “Net Generation” (or “NGen”) to describe the upcoming youth; Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) alongside Howe and Strauss (2000) have deemed them “Millennials”; Propersio and Gioia (2007) employ the term “Virtual Generation”; and Marc Prensky (2001) created the title “Digital Native” for the group.

While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it is important to note the differences in the age groups that are specified. Tapscott (2009) suggests that the Net Generation are those who are born after 1977; however, NGen ends in 1997

which then marks the beginning of “Generation Next” (p. 16). Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) also specify an end date for Millennials, defining this group as those who are born between the years 1982 and 1991. Despite all of these different names and designations, this thesis purposefully employs the terminology of connected learners in effort to be more relevant to the unique technological leanings of both teachers and learners of today.

I have chosen to use the term connected learner because it is more inclusive than any of the other terms used to describe those people who cannot remember a time before the Internet. However, it is not a term that divides individuals based on their dates of birth. Instead, this term was created to describe those who are active on and participate in the current digital culture as “learning and technology has nothing to do with generational divides” (Pontefract, 2011a, para. 2). Many scholars such as Siva Vaidhyanathan (2008) and Daniel Pontefract (2011a) argue that there is not much evidence to support that generations use technology differently, and that those who were not born in this digital age can be “just as connected, if not more so, than their younger counterparts” (Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, 2010, para. 1). Irrespective of their birth date, connected learners are sharing *connected knowledge* with each other, which results from the property of one learner either leading to or becoming of property of another learner (Downes, 2005); this sharing of knowledge is what makes the knowledge connected (Downes, 2005). In a recent speech delivered in an online web seminar, Stephen Downes (2013) outlined seven traits of highly connected learners, which include reactivity, an ability to go with the flow, a realization that connections come first, a desire to share, an

ability to learn for oneself, co-operation, and a desire to engage with others. He explains that many connected learners not only are publishing their own content online, but also are reacting to what others have to say through commenting and/or critiquing others' work (Downes, 2013). Connected learners are able to navigate through the opinions of others to go with the flow of conversations; consequently, they realize that making connections and sharing ideas and opinions through their networks is one of the most important technological practices (Downes, 2013).

Connected learners have a desire to share their life with one another, can co-operate with others to accomplish a task, and enjoy making and sustaining connections with others (Downes, 2013). In sum, Pontefract's (2011a) and Downes's (2005) writings on connected learners prove to be the most relevant, truthful, and inclusive terminology to encompass 21st century learning and technological practices.

Participatory Cultures and 21st Century Pedagogy

Framing the upcoming generation as connected learners helps to conceptualize them as people who engage in the latest digital and "participatory" cultures (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robinson, 2009, p. 4). In participatory cultures there are minimal obstacles for "artistic expression and civic engagement" and "strong support for creating and sharing creations" (p. xi) between the participants. Specific examples of participatory cultures include communities with both formal and informal memberships such as Facebook, Instagram, online role-playing games (RPGs) such as World of Warcraft, and various chat rooms and message boards; these also include any websites where youth work together to complete tasks such as creating podcasts, blogging, creating fan videos or forms of fan fiction, and also

include creating crowdsourced types of knowledge such as using Wikipedia (Jenkins et al., 2009). Members feel a “social connection” with each other, and scholarship in the field suggests that possible benefits of participatory cultures include peer-to-peer learning opportunities, the refining of skills that are valued in the workplace, and a more empowered understanding of citizenship (p. xii). Jenkins et al. also identify 11 new skills directly associated with online participatory cultures which include multitasking, distributed cognition, performance, simulation, play, collective intelligence appropriation, judgment, negotiation, transmedia navigation, and networking. Students are able to interact meaningfully while sharing knowledge and tools with each other, are able to evaluate the validity and reliability of sources, can sample and reproduce new media content, and can “follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities” (p. 106).

Participatory cultures are settings for informal learning and are also examples of social semiotic spaces that James Gee (2005) has named “affinity spaces” (p. 214). In affinity spaces, people relate to each other in terms of their common “interests, endeavors, goals, or practices” and not in terms of their class, race, disability, or gender (p. 225). Regardless of being new to the space or having experience, all people share the same common space together and can learn from each other (Gee, 2005). Knowledge is shared and crowdsourced while in these spaces, whether it is knowledge about the community or their own individual knowledge and insights that they are sharing (Gee, 2005). There is also a tacit knowledge that is both found and honored in these affinity spaces which is knowledge that is “built up in practice” but that participants “may not be able to explicate fully in words” (p. 227); this could

include how to operate in the space (i.e., how to play a game), how to design media for the spaces, or how to communicate with others (Gee, 2005).

Gee (2005) explains that many people engage more actively and participate more deeply with these informal learning cultures than they do in traditional learning spaces. He critiques the formal classroom for not providing the same opportunities for learning that affinity spaces provide, such as the fact that classrooms “reward individual knowledge,” and tend to discourage distributed and crowdsourced knowledge (p. 230). While affinity spaces and participatory cultures encourage group work, formal learning in the classroom is still seen by many as an individual undertaking that values individual achievement. The curriculum is rarely modified to reflect the current interests or desires of the students, and often the content is not relatable to the new realities of their digital world (Gee, 2005). Concerns for disability, class, race, and gender are much less flexible because of the rigid structures of the class, and tacit knowledge is infrequently acknowledged or rewarded (Gee, 2005). Gee puts forth that affinity spaces matter to young people as they are important forms of “social affiliation” in which young people can “compare and contrast how learning works” in these spaces versus how it works at school (p. 231).

Students have access to new online learning opportunities that allow them to become experts in whatever they are passionate about. This fact is leading to the rise of “pro-ams” which are “amateurs who work to professional standards” (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004, p. 12). Gee (2010) explains that young people are using the Internet and other digital tools to develop an expertise in many different areas such as “digital video, video games, digital storytelling, ... music, graphic art, political commentary”

and “robotics” (p. 26). Working in these various communities, pro-ams can network with each other and apply their passions to their learning (Gee, 2010). Networking and collaborating will help students build social capital and can ensure that there will be more innovation in society with a “healthier democracy” (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004, p. 49). As pro-ams are student professionals and experts in their field, the rise of pro-ams questions not only the teacher to student power hierarchy often found in the classroom, but also the traditional pedagogy used to teach 21st century students.

New Pedagogies of the 21st Century

The formal classroom and pedagogical methods such as direct instruction in a teacher-centered environment have been under scrutiny for decades (Dewey 1926; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989). In response to the learning needs that have arisen from such interactions as with participatory cultures and affinity spaces, Marc Prensky (2010) rejects the use of direct instruction in the classroom and offers instead what he believes to be the key to 21st century teaching and learning. Prensky offers a “partnering pedagogy” (p. 3) that shifts the focus away from direct instruction onto partnering with the students to facilitate their learning. Partnering is based on student-centered, co-constructive principles that encourage students to learn on their own or together in groups with only the teacher’s coaching and guidance (Prensky, 2010). While notions of student-centered classrooms have been around for a long time, Prensky prefers the term “partnering” for 21st century pedagogy as the title maintains that the student and teacher have an equal role to play in the classroom (Prensky, 2010). Partnering dismisses lectures as an effective method of instruction and instead asks tough questions upfront to motivate the students to seek out the answers on their

own (Prensky, 2010).

Partnering is especially important for using technology in the 21st century classroom. Instead of the teacher interrupting a lecture for a simple exercise with technology, a partnering classroom allows the students to be fully engaged and working with technology from the start of the lesson until the end (Prensky, 2010). Students are framed as the technology users and experts and the teacher is there to help supervise (Prensky, 2010). Even if the teacher is not a complete expert in the technology being used, he or she can designate students in the class to be “technology assistants” that can assist other students and also help the teacher handle any problems with equipment (p. 19); this strategy is especially useful when teaching program students. However, since there is an equal relationship between teachers and students in this classroom, there is no pressure on either the teachers or students to be experts in any technology and they can work together towards using the technology (Prensky, 2010). If the teacher is an expert, it is very important that he or she lets the students figure out the technology or project for themselves with coaching and guidance, but minimal direct instruction (Prensky, 2010).

Tapscott (1999) believed that students had shifted “from linear to hypermedia learning” (p. 5) by explaining that students can process media on the Internet in non-sequential ways and can go back and forth while browsing various sources. He wrote that learning has become a “social activity” through the ways in which technology is helping learners to connect to each other, and that the teacher should be more of a facilitator of knowledge rather than the direct transmitter (p. 7). Tapscott’s ideological stance on the new generation supports Proserpio and Gioia’s (2007) arguments that

there must be an alignment of teaching styles with learning styles to best reach our students. Tapscott's assertion that teachers could design the curriculum "in partnership with learners" (p. 5) is in direct conversation with Prensky's partnering pedagogy as both assert that the students should be actively involved in their learning with equal power between the student and teacher. Partnering pedagogy is essentially a response to Proserpio and Gioia's call for new pedagogical practices, as it keeps the learning styles of the 21st century student at the forefront in the classroom.

In response to this conversation that has been going on since the late 1990s, there is a school of thought that is now emerging as "critical digital pedagogy," which is essentially a fusion of critical pedagogy with digital spaces (Stommel, 2013). A simplistic way to define critical digital pedagogy is through "the use of electronic elements to enhance or to change the experience of education" (Croxall & Koh, 2014, para. 2); but in a more detailed sense, it can be explained as a "cacophony on voices" coming together electronically to focus on community and collaboration in a way that is open for all global voices to "reimagine the ways that communication and collaboration happen across cultural and political boundaries" (Stommel, 2014b, para. 18). Critical digital pedagogy is not necessarily the use of a Smartboard in the classroom, having students use the Internet in class, or having students make Powerpoint presentations (Stommel, 2013); instead it is about the meaningful connections that students are making to worldly concepts and networks of people when interacting with the technology that is an omnipresent force within their lives (Stommel, 2013). Critical digital pedagogy must be taught in a way that has "use and application" once the student leaves the classroom and this includes using a critical

approach to education such as Paulo Freire's (1970) problem-posing education which transforms the classroom into a space for continual questioning and dialogue for students (Stommel, 2014b, para. 18). Online spaces such as SNSs do not necessarily have moral standards or principles embedded into them, and it is up to critical digital pedagogy to teach the users of these sites and of other technology how to think critically about the use and content (Stommel, 2014b).

There is a need for critical digital pedagogy in schools, as argued by Peter Rorabaugh (2012). He suggests that as students live in a world "that digitizes and educates them through a screen," today's pupils "require an education that empowers them in that sphere, teaches them that language, and offers new opportunities of human connectivity" (para. 7). To implement critical digital pedagogy, there are several strategies that educators can use, starting with the questions that he or she may ask of the lesson content. Stommel (2014a) outlines several questions that a teacher can use to help implement this type of pedagogy into the classroom.

1. What is my primary goal for students with this course/assignment?
2. What is my digital pedagogy? How does my goal for this assignment intersect with my broader teaching philosophy?
3. What tools that I already use (analog or digital) could help me achieve these goals? (It is often best to use the tools with which we are already familiar, rather than turning to the shiny and newfangled.)
4. In order for this activity/class to work, what gaps do I need to fill with other tools/strategies?
5. Is my idea simple enough? What can I do to streamline the activity?

6. What is my goal beyond this assignment/course? How will the activity (and my pedagogy) evolve? (In other words, don't feel like you have to meet all your goals during the first attempt—think of the process, from the start, as iterative). Think also about how you can bring students (their feedback and the fruits of their work during the first iteration) into the continuing evolution of the activity/course.
7. Go back to step 1 and work through these steps (and likely several times).
(para. 2)

Stommel then outlines five more steps that teachers can use to help create a digital assessment of the activity. He explains that he separates these questions into two parts as the final assessment should not influence the teacher's pedagogy, but that good pedagogy should influence and drive the final assessment (Stommel, 2014a, para 3).

8. Does this activity need to be assessed? Or does the activity have intrinsic value? We should never assess merely for the sake of assessing. As I've said before, teachers often grade in many more situations than grading is actually required, but we should avoid with a gusto [sic] any impulse that turns students into mere columns in a spreadsheet.
9. Is there a way to build the assessment into the assignment? For example, can I have students reflecting on their process inside the activity itself? Can my assessment arise organically from within, and as part of, the learning activity?
10. What additional assessment strategies should I use? (These might include peer-assessment, self-assessment, narrative feedback, peer review, points, a rubric, letter grade, or some combination.) External summative assessment

should be a last resort, a necessary evil (in some cases). I firmly believe the goal of education should always be better learning and not better assessments.

11. What is my goal in assessing student work?

12. Go back to step 8. (para. 3)

Teachers are encouraged to start with determining the primary goal of their future project while working towards creating their own definition of critical digital pedagogy; these can be valuable steps for the teacher, especially if he or she has never considered what constitutes this type of pedagogy. Following step 7 and then going back through the questions will help ensure that teachers understand how their project relates to digital pedagogy, and what skills the students will ascertain from completing the project. Similarly, questions 8 through 12 on assessment ensure that the assessment created for the project will flow organically from the project, and will be a fair exemplification of the critical digital task. Embracing critical digital pedagogy in the classroom can be a reality for all teachers, especially when using the aforementioned questions as a guide to classroom planning.

Teachers can also embrace connectivism in their class to better respond to the needs of their connected learners while adapting the new critical digital pedagogy (Siemens, 2009). Connectivism-based pedagogy offers the learner rapidly changing and complex learning scenarios with varied sources of knowledge and also allows the learners to connect to others to grow their networks (Siemens, 2009). Learning is influenced by the network's diversity and allows for a continual "expansion of knowledge" where knowledge is expanded on and shared between the participants (para. 5). In fact, Siemens argues that other learning theories cannot account for the

expansion of knowledge that naturally happens via online networks; if the learners are to construct their own knowledge as promoted by constructivism, then it is not possible for them to “create a cognitive structure more complex than the one they already possess” which is a facet of connectivism that happens organically (para. 5). Popular and progressive learning theories like constructivism do share similar characteristics to connectivism; however, connectivism contends that learning should never be restricted to what the learners already know; learners should always be connected to abundant sources of knowledge through online networks (Siemens, 2009). They should be given the opportunities to share their knowledge and track how that knowledge changes and evolves, which many connected learners are already doing through their current computer and personal technology use (Siemens, 2009). Downes (2007a) writes that connectivism consists of the ability to “construct and traverse” the networks that the students are linked to, and in doing so the students discover how knowledge is constructed (para. 1). Siemens (2009) suggests that connections are formed on “neural, cognitive/conceptual, and social” levels, and connectivism encompasses all three aspects of this triad (para. 6). Rather than containing rigid rules and resources that only stress content, connectivism allows learning to “flow” and emphasizes the experience of personal learning, and a recognition of emerging patterns (Downes, 2008, para. 17).

Connectivism can help pedagogical practice transform the classroom to reflect the connected realities of society, and effective ways that teachers can implement connectivism in the class is through collaborative and integrated technology, and through the creation of online communities that are continually available to the

students (Downes, 2007b; Siemens, 2009). Such examples of connectivism at work in the classroom include using tools like websites “instaGrok” and “Schoology” in the classroom. Teachers can create activities and assessments that use these connectivist websites and others as learning tools; these websites help knowledge to be expanded on and shared amongst learners.

instaGrok is a search engine that organizes any idea, topic, or theme that students search online, and then presents the links in an easy to navigate web of words (instaGrok Inc., 2014). These word webs are packed with information, videos, key facts, links to websites, concepts, and notes, and this website uses “sophisticated semantic technology” to ensure that only credible sources are used and displayed in the word maps for students (instaGrok Inc., 2014). The results can also be filtered by difficulty level, and the goal of this search engine website is to teach students critical research skills such as understanding terminology, synthesizing resources, and evaluating ideas (instaGrok Inc., 2014). As many other search engines overwhelm students with too much information or irrelevant content, this site presents information to students in an accessible way, and also has options for students to save the word webs, to journal and record what they have found, and to customize their word webs of information and share them with others (instaGrok Inc., 2014). Students can track how different ideas relate to each other and see how these ideas evolve and progress while learning 21st century skills such as evaluating research sources.

Similarly, Schoology is a learning management system (LMS) that is essentially an online SNS for a classroom that allows teachers to post about upcoming

projects and receive electronically submitted projects from students (Schoology, 2015). This page provides a safe space for students to network via a secure e-mail, allows for the posting of grades online, allows for the posting of projects and notes, has calendars with due dates, has a homepage to see other users recent activities, and also has an interface that resembles Facebook so that students are comfortable using this tool (Schoology, 2015). LMSs like Schoology allow curriculum knowledge to be created and shared amongst students in the same way that students create and share knowledge on their personal social media accounts.

These sites differ from traditional classroom practice where knowledge can be limited to the bodies in the classroom and flow in a unidirectional way from either the textbook or the teacher. Schoology and instaGrok allow for the expansion and construction of knowledge while students traverse and explore new networks, and are thus effective tools for implementing connectivist pedagogy. They can also be accessed and used while outside of the classroom, allowing learning to transcend the parameters of the physical school sphere.

Social Media in the Classroom

In alignment with critical digital pedagogy and connectivist websites, many teachers are using SNSs in their classrooms to reap the educational benefits that these sites offer their connected learners. For example, Jason Phillips (2013) uses Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory to emphasize the educational value that Instagram can have for students when used in the classroom. He writes that this SNS can help develop spatial intelligence, linguistic intelligence, logical mathematical, and inter and intrapersonal intelligence amongst its users (Phillips, 2013). As Instagram is

a photo-sharing website, the taking and editing of pictures as well as the captions and feedback options encourage students to be spatially and linguistically aware (Phillips, 2013). When students crop photos or take fine measurements to edit their pictures on Photoshop before posting, they are using their mathematical intelligence (Phillips, 2013). Kelly Walsh (2013), a college professor and founder of EmergingEdTech.com, promotes seven ways that social learning applications can positively influence education, including engagement, social learning, more effective management of class time, more opportunities for assessment, the ability to reach more students, the help it provides in getting students ahead of the professional curve, and the connections that students are able to build. She also believes that SNSs belong in the classroom and can be used to accelerate engagement and learning.

Teachers can use social media to help manage their classrooms and further their professional development. Teachers are using the SNS Twitter to *tweet* (post) about upcoming projects and due dates for assignments, and also track students' engagement with the material out of class using a class wide hashtag (Dunn, 2012). Pinterest also has boards devoted to lesson plans, and teachers all over the world pin their ideas and share resources with each other (Kane, 2013). On Pinterest, Vicki Davis who is best known as "Cool Cat Teacher" has 44 different boards on her page that are related to teaching, including boards on iPad and iPhone apps for teachers, hot stuff in technology, classroom organization and decoration, and a board for teaching high school science (Davis, 2015). New Jersey principal Eric Sheninger also uses Pinterest and the topics on his 14 boards include web 2.0 tools for educators, iPad apps for administrators, educational videos, and digital citizenship (Sheninger,

2015). Teachers can subscribe to education-based boards such as Sheninger's or Davis's and create their own for others to follow too. As SNSs are also popular "apps" or applications for today's cellphones, teachers can communicate with their class using Pinterest, Tumblr, or Twitter, and have the message delivered right to the students' phone—for example, if material is needed for the next class, or as a reminder about an upcoming test (Carey, 2012).

Loizzo and Ertmer (2014) offer 10 strategies for using social media in the classroom and recommend that teachers become social media savvy and boost their confidence with these tools. They also suggest that teachers get to know the school's tech support specialists whom can assist in the facilitation of the technology and help the teacher learn more about technology in the classroom (Loizzo & Ertmer, 2014). Educators should teach students to be good cybercitizens and can follow up the social media use with a lesson to help reinforce the learning (Loizzo & Ertmer, 2014). John Spencer (2012) also outlines different activities that teachers can use to implement Instagram in their classes, including utilizing digital storytelling, practicing grammar on photo captions, doing photojournalism, creating photo prompts for themselves, finding metaphors within chosen photos, creating photo blogs, finding and documenting context within photos, doing an ethnographic study, sharing art, and exercising creative and artistic expression through taking their own pictures. Mary Ann Bell (2013) suggests using Instagram on field trips, having students create photo stories and essays based on curriculum expectations, and having the entire class or school participate on Instagram by using one universal "hashtag" to share their work with others. Further, Hannah Hudson (2013) suggests having students role play and

imagine how a famous person in history would have used Instagram, imagine what a favourite character would post, have the students go on a scavenger hunt, record steps in a science experiment, and even share reading recommendations; she also proposes that teachers could create a classroom Instagram account that features a student of the week.

Overall, many scholars agree that because learning styles have changed, conceptions of traditional pedagogical instruction should become more innovative, and this could include adapting a critical digital pedagogy, embracing connectivism, and using SNS in the classroom.

Virtual Identity and Performativity

As discussed in the previous chapter, the 21st century student possesses a virtual or online identity that has changed the nature of the socialization experience of schooling. In this research I offer my own definition of virtual identity as the direct representation of how one portrays him or herself in an online or virtual context, including pictures, videos, audio files, profiles, avatars, games, chat rooms, personal websites, and any other form of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Unfortunately, concepts of virtual identities have been put into simplistic binaries as having either a positive or a negative influence on youth, or as being completely truthful or entirely false representations of people. This section will explore scholarship in the field in order to better understand different impacts virtual identities have for youth and their developing identities.

Are Virtual Identities Truthful?

In *Simulacra and Simulation* Jean Baudrillard (1994) declares that society has

developed too much of a dependence on models, maps, and representations of life that has caused us to lose touch with the realm of the real. He further claims that we are living in a state of “hyperreal” (p. 4), a term used to describe how there is no distinction between reality and simulation. The hyperreal has “substitut[ed] the signs of the real for the real” (p. 2), meaning that the simulations of what is natural are what have become accepted as the real. However, our postmodern culture cannot be considered artificial, an imitation, or a parody, because these things require the real to be present as a reference and we as a society are unable to distinguish the difference between these simulations and the natural (Baudrillard, 1994). Humans have become so caught up with simulacra, which is Baudrillard’s term for artificial signs, that our routines and life as we know it are only simulations of activities; our postmodern culture has lost all ability to distinguish any difference between simulation and reality (Baudrillard, 1994).

Our online identities, especially those conveyed by pictures, would thus be considered a collection of simulacrums as they are carefully chosen representations of our self. However, as we live in the hyperreal that mixes real and simulation, this real self can only ever be considered a simulation. It could be argued that on mediums like Instagram and Facebook, where pictures are the building blocks of identity, individuals post photos where they are *simulating* activities rather than *experiencing* them in the moment. Consequently, our online identities then become a simulacrum of a simulated activity for our simulated self that exists in the hyperreal, and how we choose to represent ourselves in the online world cannot be considered real because entire portrayals of virtual identity are a collection of simulacra and simulated

activities (Baudrillard, 1994); according to Baudrillard we would be unable to determine the difference between the real and artifice anyway. However, if the virtual social capital that arises from our virtual identity simulacra can influence the way that we are treated in our physical “hyperreality” world, then our simulacra and simulations do have weight and are important to our identity even if they cannot be considered absolute truthful representations of self.

Baudrillard is a catalyst for thinking about truthful performances of online identity and to what extent they adequately represent their users. Barnett (2009) suggests that online identities are collected pieces that are “always in flux” and “always assembled” by the users (p. 205). As an administrator and teacher at a traditional college preparatory school, Barnett saw students “spend countless hours crafting their online identities” (p. 202), witnessed good students post pictures depicting engagement in illegal activities, and also interviewed several parents whom broke down in tears over content involving their child that was posted online. When asked as to why she posted pictures of illegal activity, one student told Barnett that she wished “adults at this school would understand that those pictures are not really us” (p. 202). Barnett interviewed a group of girls from his school who spoke to that quotation, adding that their online activity is more about “creating” an identity for themselves rather than “figuring out” who they are (p. 207). The girls shared that the pictures that they post online are not true representations of themselves, rather are moments where they are “being funny” or “goofy” and only showcase a small representation of whom the girls are as a whole (p. 207). Online tools have given youth the ability to “assemble, disassemble, and reassemble their identities” (p. 203),

leaving Barnett to conclude that these students are not who they are portrayed to be in their pictures. He proposes a methodology of postmodern assemblage to examine virtual identities as this could “account for heteroglossic identities” (p. 207) that emerge as the students pass from the virtual into the real world. In order to understand adolescent identity, researchers can use analytical techniques including postmodern aesthetics such as “long poems” and “instillation art” (p. 208). In sum, Barnett concludes that identity should not be determined solely by the pictures that one posts online and that students are more than what they chose to be portrayed as in the virtual realm.

Similar to Barnett, boyd (2014) discusses personal anecdotes of several teens who struggle with the navigation and presentation of their self in an online context. She describes how a participant in her study named Hunter struggles to express himself on Facebook in a way that is appropriate for all of the audiences that access his profile. He gets frustrated when his family comments on statuses that were only intended for his friends, and he gets especially angry when his younger sister tries to reply to his friends or message them on Facebook. Because of these reasons he has restricted his family’s access to his profile, even though he has a good relationship with them and would like to keep them on his Facebook.

Hunter is one of the many examples that boyd (2014) uses to show that context matters in these teens’ lives. boyd explains that teens “manage social dynamics differently” be it in the cafeteria, texting a group, or posting on Facebook (p. 39). She adds that “what matters is not the particular social media site but the context to which it’s situated within a particular group of youth” (p. 39). In Hunter’s

example, his family was not the intended audience of his profile and therefore their continual comments were received as far out of the appropriate context and away from the responses he desired. Hunter's perception of Facebook's context was as a place for friends and not his family; even though he cared a lot about his family they were not the intended audience and their interactions with his content were unwelcomed.

Teens navigate different realms as they “maneuver between different contexts” that are shaped by “setting, time, and audience” (boyd, 2014, p. 41). boyd (2014) uses the metaphor of a dance to describe how teens float between these contexts and realms to present themselves in different ways. Within these settings, teens will post things online that they think are funny or that give off a certain impression, and these actions can be misinterpreted when read out of context. boyd did an interview with a father who used MySpace and was very happy when his 16-year-old daughter requested to be his friend. However, he was very upset when he saw the content of her posts, including a quiz that she had taken entitled “What Drug are You?” to which the answer was cocaine (p. 44). The father interpreted this to mean that his daughter did cocaine and was a strong supporter of cocaine, and was distraught until he confronted his daughter. The daughter explained that he needed to calm down because it was just a quiz that was meant for fun and was not indicative of an actual interest in cocaine. Although the father was relieved, he and his daughter had a series of discussions about online portrayals and third-party interpretations of presentations of self.

In the same way that the young ladies in Barnett's (2009) article felt their photos were misunderstood, the young MySpace user was misinterpreted because of the quizzes that she posted online. boyd draws attention to the fact that context and intended audience are two of the most important things when examining how students perform online, and that non-social media users or anyone looking at online profiles needs to consider these two elements.

Other research suggests that it is not only what we are posting online that influences public perceptions of online identities, but how others interact on social media pages. Walther et al.'s (2008) study indicates that cues left on social media profiles by friends or acquaintances can affect observers' feelings and attitudes towards the profile owner. Comments or posts that are left by others "may be more compelling" than what an individual says about him or herself, and are more likely to be believed than something posted by the user (p. 33). Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, and Tong (2008) focused strictly on Facebook and created profiles that each participant in the study viewed, and then immediately after viewing each participant completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire used a Likert-type response scale and focused on task, social, and physical attractiveness; task attractiveness including items such as "I have confidence in this person's ability to get the job done" (p. 40). Research found that Facebook friends did influence the results of the study, as the "greater [the] physical attractiveness" of the friends that posted on an individual's Facebook wall, the greater the subjects in this study rated the physical attractiveness of the account owner (p. 41). Further, when the owner had positive comments left on their wall by others, observers scored the profile higher in the social attractiveness

category, task attractiveness category, and overall credibility category (Walther et al., 2008). Even though the profile maker did not create the postings left by the friends, these environmental cues impacted the way that the profiles were received and the way that the individual's virtual identity was portrayed.

Research as a whole is still unconvincing and inconclusive about whether or not the Internet encourages truthful or false representations of self, and also if the Internet is hindering our ability to then communicate in the offline context. Many have made the argument that social media negatively impacts our ability to communicate face-to-face (Fowlkes, 2012; Free, 2014; Tardanico, 2012), while others such as blogger Leisa Reichelt (2007) suggest that social media allows its users to be connected to each other like never before. Reichelt uses social media to stay in touch with friends and family and has coined the term “ambient intimacy” to describe using SNSs to stay updated and connected with those that you are close to, but may not see in person very often. The exchanges that are made in the virtual realm may not be the same as face-to-face communication, but many argue that they are still real experiences that are both significant and important to the users (Jarvis, 2008; Reichelt, 2007; Thompson, 2008). However, as Baudrillard (1994), Barnett (2009), and boyd (2014) remind us, the degree to which these online representations are a truthful portrayal of self, with consideration to context and audience, needs to be considered.

Social Network[ing] Sites and Virtual Social Capital

boyd and Ellison (2008) discuss the intricacies of SNSs and also offer suggestions for future scholarship in the field. Firstly, they reject using the acronym

of SNS, which stands for the commonly accepted phrase “Social Networking Site,” as they write that the term *networking* “emphasizes relationship initiation ... between strangers” which they feel is not the primary use of these websites (2008, p. 211). Instead, their use of SNS refers to Social *Network* Sites, as most of the users choose to network between friends. For the purpose of this research I employ the term Social Networking Site as a conscious choice because I do not agree that all networking is done amongst strangers. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary offers a definition for “social networking” as “the creation and maintenance of personal and business relationships, especially online,” and this definition is void of suggesting interactions amongst unfamiliar persons (“Social Networking,” 2015). Further, even if networking did imply interacting with strangers, it is problematic to make assumptions that most users only network with friends; my personal experience with Instagram and blogging have led me to seek out various activists and leaders in the community whom I have never met; consequently, the use of SNS in this paper will remain unchanged.

Ellison and boyd (2013) offer a very detailed breakdown of how SNSs function, including a discussion of synchronous versus asynchronous virtual communities; synchronous refers to one-on-one interactions while asynchronous refers to one to many online interactions. Various sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have profiles that allow for asynchronous communication, but also permit synchronous and private communication that influences the user experience of these programs (Ellison & boyd, 2013). For example, Facebook has the private messaging feature, Twitter has a “retweet” option and also an option to privately message profiles, and Instagram has also recently added private messaging as a new feature

where a user can send a picture directly to an account without publicly posting it. Asynchronous communication is influenced by the users' "friends" list, which is an important characteristic to understand when unpacking how these interactions happen. Ellison and boyd chronicle how online friendships used to be a reciprocal; one party would request a friendship and when the other party accepted, then both accounts had the other as "friends"; however, as SNSs like Twitter grew, so did the idea that online relationships "could be unidirectional," in that one party does not reciprocate on the friendship (p. 155). Twitter changed how SNSs set up their friend options through being the first to allow users to be friends with others (referred to as "following" on Twitter) without receiving a follow in return; sites took a cue from Twitter and now many SNSs refer to those who have these unrequited friendships as "followers" rather than the profile's "friends." Ellison and boyd's conversation on friendships and asynchronous communication is a starting point for constructing criteria for a profile's virtual social capital.

Sites like Twitter and Instagram exploit the asymmetrical friendship as a form of status among its users; the more followers a profile has, then the more status it attains in the community. My research investigates the value that students place on the status of online accounts such as Instagram and Facebook, and an understanding of the tangled nature of friendships and followers will be of value to this concept. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between sites like Facebook and the social capital that a user has in an offline context (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009); however, these studies focus solely on Facebook and the maintenance of existing social connections

through online interactions. While these studies give value to how online interactions influence offline activities and how students prioritize their time online, there are gaps in the research that these studies do not fill.

The past few years have seen the phenomena of smart phones, and cell phones in general, completely change the way that students communicate both in person and on SNSs. This has led to a complete shift in the way that social media functions; students are no longer limited to their computers to interact through SNSs and instead have instant access to these sites anywhere with their cell phone data or Internet connection. The camera feature has also changed the ways in which students perform online, and studies need to address this new method of virtual performativity through pictures.

Another gap in the research includes the fact that profiles, such as those on Instagram and Twitter, are now generating their own status through the content that is being posted, giving way to new slang words for status such as “Instafamous” and “Instacelebrity.” In fact, the number of websites and online tutorials devoted to raising one’s status online are multifarious and abundant; sites like getinstafamous.com, wikiHow pages on “How to be a Twitter Celebrity,” “How to be more popular on Twitter,” tagsforlikes.com which lists the most popular hashtags to use on photos to generate traffic, and dozens of YouTube videos on how to become an Internet celebrity are among the many online resources devoted to raising one’s virtual social capital.

In 1968, Andy Warhol showcased his work at the Moderna Museet Museum in Stockholm and his exhibition catalogue had pieces under the theme “in the future,

everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes” (Martin, 2014, para. 1). His words served as an underlying prediction of interactions in digital culture; social media and the desired virtual social capital acquired by accounts are changing the ways that people, especially students, perform their offline identities in an online context. Instant access has created a generation that is fascinated with celebrity culture, and Warhol’s words on fame can serve as this generation’s mantra that needs to be addressed in research.

Identities as Performances

Many studies and scholarly writings on identities, virtual identities, and performativity use Erving Goffman’s (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* as both a theoretical framework and major foundation for their publications (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Walker, 2000; Walther et al., 2008). In this work Goffman equates self-presentation with the performativity of theatre, as everyday life is a performance that can be examined from a “dramaturgical” perspective (p. 63). He defines a “performance” as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any other of the participants” (p. 8), and it is his definition of performance that is used for this research; that is, the idea that performativity exists in the actions of the individual.

According to Goffman (1959), an individual’s performativity has several layers that are comparable to that of an actor. An individual may be “sincerely convinced” that his or her act is a truthful and honest performance, or an individual may remain unconvinced and cynical themselves of the message he or she is sending (p. 10); there is usually a continuum of these extremes to which these performances

sit. The individual might also be completely unaware of the message that he or she is sending to the observers; however, regardless of the motivation behind the performance the audience will still take away an impression and assumption of the actor's identity (Goffman, 1959). The observer's tendency to make judgments about the performer's identity is valuable to a discussion on impressions of SNS profiles.

When examining an actor's performativity, the "front" is considered to be the overall image that the actor gives to the audience, and this can be broken down further into a "personal front" consisting of sign vehicles such as "clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures" et cetera (Goffman, 1959, pp. 13-14).

Additionally, when an individual seeks out a new social role to embody there is usually a "social front" that has previously been created and associated with that role (Goffman, 1959, p. 19). Consequently, he or she could be motivated to perform that role by the appeal of the front rather than the task itself that the front represents (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) explains that different social roles are actually performed through such mannerisms as different speech or language patterns, and a person taking on a new social role adapts to the social scripts that have been previously written by others in that role. Even if a front is considered to be new, there will still be remnants of old scripts, and a new front can never contain a new script as individuals always use their previous social scripts to make sense of new situations (Goffman, 1959). This complements Baudrillard's work on simulacra and simulation as both theorists suggest that individuals can never be truly original and free from the influence of others' ideas; Baudrillard just pushes this sentiment further to suggest that nothing in

this world can ever be considered real or original and thus everything is a simulation.

The social front can be divided into several parts that include “setting, appearance, and manner” (Goffman, 1959, p. 19), which assist in further explaining the complexities of personal performativity. Performances are usually catered to the setting and the audience of that setting, and different settings can require different performances from the individual (Goffman, 1959). The individual can present an “idealized” performance of identity to the audience in which he or she can try to present a better version of self, and these romanticized ideas can be influenced by the dominant cultural values held by the audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). However, the performer can absolutely conceal or understate personal beliefs or values if they are incompatible with that of the audience. The appearance of an individual can also portray such values as the social status, gender, age, personal details, and occupation, while mannerisms indicate how the performer wants to be perceived through his or her actions (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) also notes that the audience will only see the end product of the individual, and there can often be a discrepancy between reality and appearance. This is partly because behaviour exists through front stage and back stage ideals where the individual situates his or her disposition (Goffman, 1959). The front stage of our life refers to public situations in which an individual desires to make a good impression on his or her audience, such as at work or in the school sphere (Goffman, 1959). The backstage refers to the environments in which an individual can be who they really are, such as in the comfort of his or her own home or with family (Goffman 1959). SNSs are venues that offer an individual a front stage to perform his

or her identity, and research still needs to be conducted on whether SNSs are spaces for, or encourage, the “truthful” backstage behaviour. Further, individuals can sometimes be misrepresented or even mystified while performing, and “mystification” is a form of impression management whereby the individual keeps a “social distance” from the audience; misrepresentation or mystification could influence SNS performances (Goffman, 1959, p. 44).

Goffman’s framework on individual performativity is key to understanding how we perform in both offline and online contexts. Even though Goffman’s work dates back to the late 1950s, his structure is still relevant to present-day virtual interactions as many scholars argue that electronic exchanges are a logical extension of his work (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Miller & Arnold, 2009). For example, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) use Goffman for their examination of user representation in an online virtual reality game called *Second Life* (SL). In this game, the users (called “residents”) design an avatar for themselves and then live any kind of life they desire in the SL world through the avatar. There are no objectives or aims when playing SL and users use their avatars to travel in the SL world and socialize, to meet other residents, to participate in events such as concerts, lectures, or fashion shows, to work at their dream job, and overall to live and thrive in the world of their dreams (“What is Second Life,” 2014). Bullingham and Vasconcelos found that despite the participants’ ability to perform any kind of identity on SL, “participants often attempt to recreate their offline selves online” in contrast to performing an entirely new or fantasy identity (p. 109). There were 10 participants in total and the requirement was that each had a minimum of 12 months experience as an active

blogger, SL user, or both. The users did admit to an “embellishment” of their qualities for both the blog posts and SL avatars, while some chose to “highlight” aspects of their personality instead of recreating it exactly (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 107). Either way, the online presence that the user had was not a separate entity from his or herself, but rather was an addition or extension of the user’s personality (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). The user’s online voice was “true to the offline one,” and Goffman’s dramaturgical model and also later work on mask and persona are still relevant to coding and explaining these interactions in the virtual world (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 110).

Like Goffman, Judith Butler (1988) also addresses identity performances in her work; however, her writings on performances address gender and how social constructions of gender influence identity in society. Butler argues that gender exists as a “stylized repetition of acts” as the body performs gender through “gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds” (p. 270). She further suggests that gender is not biologically situated, rather it is socially constructed through everyday performances. Her essay uses Simone de Beauvoir’s writings as a catalyst to explain how one “becomes” a woman rather than is born a woman, emphasizing the fact that gender exists as a series of performances (p. 270). Butler also relies on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological theories that maintain that the body is an “historical idea” and also a “set of possibilities to be continually realized” (p. 272) as it acquires meaning in the world. Therefore a person is not limited to what their body is, but rather how they perform their body (Butler, 1988). Butler asks the reader to consider gender as a “corporeal style” and emphasizes the difference between sex and gender.

As bodies are transformed with gendered pronouns such as *his* body or *her* body, Butler explains that the body is always marked by gender and consequently becomes the gender that it is marked by. The body is often forced to take on either the male or female gender binary, and Butler describes that “compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed ... through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes” (p. 275) by society. She clarifies this point by explaining that the body is not merely a passive recipient of these norms, but that the actor generally enacts the “interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (p. 277). Generally, if one performs their gender well they receive praise and are socially accepted, and if they perform their gender in a way that is deemed inappropriate then they are usually punished in some way (Butler, 1998). Her work suggests that identities are situated and performed by the body within society’s heteronormative social constructions of gender (Butler, 1998).

Conclusion

An understanding of connected learners, virtual identities, and identities as performances are essential when addressing gaps in the research pertaining to students’ online performativity and SNS use. The explored themes and scholars are of value when assessing the importance of the research and addressing the effectiveness of the proposed research questions. The next section of this research will examine the methodology employed to answer the outlined research questions and will outline the research design, a justification for choosing qualitative research, data collection, data analysis, efforts taken to establish trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

This study investigates the influence that virtual identities have on the 21st century students' new socialization experience and how SNSs influence students' behaviour in the school sphere. Chapter 3 discusses the research methods used to examine this phenomenon and begins with a description of the research design that outlines why qualitative inquiry was the desired approach for this study. The conversation then moves into specifics about the participants, site, data collection, and data analysis. Efforts to establish trustworthiness are explored using Lincoln and Guba (1984) and Guba's (1981) four major areas of concern in naturalistic research that can be applied to all qualitative inquiry, which are interpreted as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Attention to ethics and ethical considerations are then outlined followed by a discussion on the limitations of the study.

Research Design

Qualitative inquiry assumes reality to be "socially constructed" in that it leads to "multiple realities" where individuals hold their own interpretations and unique perspectives (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). As reality is considered "multiple, constructed, and holistic," a qualitative design contrasts greatly with the positivist nature of quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1984, p. 37). Qualitative inquiry investigates how individuals interpret their own encounters and experiences and also how they assign meaning to these experiences; at its core it is interested in "understanding the meaning people have constructed" of phenomena (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). Therefore choosing qualitative inquiry for this study allowed for an examination of the lived experience of students' virtual social practices while investigating the phenomena

using the “inner experience of participants” (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). In this case, the insider participants were the students who use SNSs both in and out of school and a qualitative approach helped to examine their personal perceptions on the complex and entwined facets of virtual identity; this research also employed both an etic perspective (outside researcher perspective), and emic perspective (insider participant perspective) common in qualitative inquiry (Lapan et al., 2011). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain, qualitative inquiry can be used to examine “behaviors, emotions, and feelings” as well as “cultural phenomena” (p. 11) that allows for the true experiences of the participants to be heard and analyzed.

Participants

The participants were chosen based on the following criteria for this study:

1. They want to share their views on social media and socialization;
2. Are currently enrolled in high school;
3. Participate on SNSs with a minimum participation on Instagram and Facebook;
4. Have a public Instagram profile.

From my various involvements in the Niagara community over the past 7 years, I have personally met an array of high school students who fit these criteria, and acquired their contact information. Thus students who use SNSs and attend high school in Southwestern Ontario were recruited for the study. Six student participants were initially recruited using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to “non-random ways” that ensure particular inclusion criteria is met within a sampling universe (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) assert

that purposive sampling can “maximize the range of specific information” that can be acquired from the participants, and can provide “rich detail” about the phenomena being study (p. 33).

Having the participants’ email addresses, I sent out the letters of invitation and waited to be contacted. Of the six invited, all six expressed interest in knowing more about the study and they were sent either the consent form (if they were 18 years of age) or the parental consent form (if they were under the age of 18 and were considered minors). If they were under the age of 18, the letter of invitation stated that the participants were encouraged to talk about the study with their parents before responding that they would like to know more and receive the parental consent forms. If the participants responded after receiving the parental consent form that they wanted to participate, and confirmed their parents or guardians signed the form, we then arranged a time to meet at a privately booked room at a university in Southern Ontario for the interview. Participants who were 18 indicated that they would like to participate and had signed the consent form prior to making arrangements to meet. Because the parental consent form requires a signature, I asked the participants to bring the signed copy of the consent form to the interview. A copy of the interview questions was given to participants at the start of the interview. Pseudonyms were also chosen by the participants at the start of the interview to guarantee anonymity.

Although all six participants who were initially asked agreed to participate, one of the participants did not follow through for the interview. He did not show up to the interview four times in a 2-week period, and after the fourth time it was clear that I needed to find a new participant. Although my inclusion criteria was that students

needed to be in high school, I have personally met a student who has been out of high school for 6 months after completing a grade 12 “B” year last year. He is 19 years old, actively participates on Facebook and Instagram, has a public Instagram profile, has been out of high school for less than a year, and wanted to share his views on social media. The same process of recruitment was employed, and I emailed him a letter of invitation. He expressed interest in learning more about the study and I sent him the informed consent form and then later arranged a time and place to meet at a university in Southern Ontario for the interview. Therefore, five of the participants recruited for the study were in high school, while one had been out of high school for less than a year.

My participants for the study included Hermione, Phoenix, Veronica, Blair, Michael, and Gerald FitzGerald (who will be referred to by his first name for simplicity purposes). Having the participants choose their own name was important as this study is based on their lived experiences and identity. Since my participants were the most important part of the project, I wanted them to feel like their ideas and therefore their identities were always acknowledged and respected.

Six participants allowed for a diverse population that encompassed different perspectives on students and social networking site use. The participants were a diverse sample due to their differences in ages and grades, genders, backgrounds, and attendance at different schools across Southwestern Ontario. A chart on participant demographics is included in Table 1. The participants also demonstrated a wide range in how many times they use social media on a daily basis, and also how many pictures the participants take on a daily basis; these data are also included in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Preferred gender	Age	Social media use per day	Photos taken per day
Phoenix	Female	15	50-100	1-10
Veronica	Female	16	50-100	30
Blair	Female	16	50	2-4
Hermione	Female	17	50	1-10 (sometimes 50+)
Gerald	Male	17	100+	15-20
Michael	Male	19	100+	30-40 (sometimes 100+ if at event)

The participants also used an array of social media websites, and had different standards of “good” participation on each medium, and that helped contribute to the diverse population of participants selected for study.

Instagram Over Facebook

Exploring their Instagram use rather than their Facebook use was a conscious and strategic choice for this study that needs to be addressed. As discussed, Facebook allows for both asynchronous and synchronous communication, but the friendships formed online are reciprocal and link the profiles to each other; you cannot look at a Facebook profile without “friending” the other party. Friending the participants on Facebook ran the risk of exposing the anonymity of the participants. There are ways to make a Friends list private and hidden from public view, however, there is no way to disable the “mutual friends” feature and hide that portion of the friends list from another Facebook user (Facebook, 2015). Because of this feature, using Facebook for data collection was not considered the best choice for this project as I could not guarantee the utmost security for my participants’ identity; I could not guarantee that their real names and identity would be kept hidden from the public under all circumstances. I thus opted to only examine their Instagram accounts, for which I did not need to friend or follow to view and gather data from. A criterion for the study was that the participants had public Instagram accounts, therefore I could view their Instagram profiles at any time without alerting them or leaving a trail that could in any way link our profiles. As discussed, Instagram is surpassing Facebook as the most commonly used venue for teenagers, and I was confident I could gather enough data from these accounts alone.

Site

Through my correspondence with the participants, we arranged a time to meet at a privately booked room at a university in Southern Ontario. As these participants are between the ages of 14-19, I knew that they might not have their own vehicle or be eligible to drive themselves to be interviewed. If they could not arrange a ride with a friend or family member, I suggested that they take public transportation or that they order a taxi to and from the university from their home; financial compensation for both methods of transportation was provided to the participants in the interview. Further, if participants had their own vehicle, they were to be provided with compensation for the parking costs at the university; while this measure was communicated to the participants, no one that came to be interviewed had their own vehicle. Participants were informed that the cost of their transportation would be covered through the correspondence, the letter of invitation, and through the consent forms.

All six of the interviews took place at a university in Southern Ontario in a quiet and private library study room. The interviews were conducted with the door kept closed to further ensure anonymity.

Data Collection

This study utilized multiple sources of data, including the transcripts from individual semi-structured interviews, the researcher's personal journal kept throughout the entire process, and data from the participants' personal Instagram accounts that included captions, hashtags, and pictures that the participants had posted.

Interviews

Participants engaged in one, one time in-depth semi-structured interview in

effort to unearth the true experiences of students who use social media (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Each interview question was “open-ended” to allow for the interviewee to share as much or as little on the topic as he/she felt comfortable doing (Creswell, 2013, p. 163). The questions were peer reviewed by two separate individuals to ensure the queries encouraged honest answers that were not influenced by the wording or phrasing; one peer holds an M.A. in critical sociology, and another peer is a recent graduate of the M.Ed program. It is important that the questions were worded in a way that did not contain a bias that would push an idea on, or suggest a response for the interviewee (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Patton (2002) outlines six types of questions that are the most appropriate for qualitative research which include questions about experience and behaviour, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background questions. Thus, interview questions were constructed in a way that adhered to the six above criteria to ensure the participants’ experiences on the phenomena were kept as a focus for each question. An example of the research questions can be found in Appendix A.

I recognize that as a researcher my responses to the questions, my tone, and my body language could influence the participants’ answers, and I took actions to minimize any interference my communication may have (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further, each participant chose his or her own pseudonym to which I continually referred to while recording the interview. I made a conscious effort to only use their pseudonym once chosen to help make them feel more comfortable and remind them again that their interview was anonymous and their identity would be kept secure.

Public Social Media Accounts

Participants' public Instagram profiles were also examined to further understand how these students are using these mediums to perform their virtual identity and communicate to each other.

The fact that their Instagram accounts would be examined for this project was stated first on the letter of invitation, then on both of the parental consent forms and the informed consent forms, and it was also stated in person within the assent script if the participant was under the age of 18. Participants were fully aware that content from their account such as their pictures, captions, and hashtags were to be used as data for this project. The criteria for participation in the project included that participants have an Instagram account that is viewable to the public, thus the accounts were available at any time for anyone to view.

In terms of data collected from these Instagram accounts, a total of 1,357 pictures and captions were examined for this project with an average of four hashtags per photo.

Personal Research Journal

During this process, I kept a journal to chronicle my ideas and realizations about the study, and also to reflect on the interviews and information gathered from the social media accounts. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), keeping a reflexive journal "supports not only the credibility, but also the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study" (p. 143). Lincoln and Guba (1984) explain that keeping a journal impacts these trustworthiness criteria because it can reveal the extent to which "the inquirer's biases influenced the outcomes" (p. 327). The journal

was divided into Lincoln and Guba's three suggested categories that included the schedule and logistics of the study, a personal diary of the researcher's own values, interests, and insights, and a methodological log where decisions and rationales are recorded (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Entries were made daily into the diary section as I recorded my continual thoughts on the research topic, relevant quotations pertaining to research and critical theory, and commentaries on current events surrounding 21st century technological practices, and an example entry of this type can be found in Appendix B. Entries were made as needed in the logistics of the study and methodological log (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Furthermore, my reflections and thoughts were recorded immediately after each interview and entries were also recorded after each viewing session of the participants' Instagram profiles.

Data Analysis

The interviews were first transcribed verbatim exactly as heard on the audio recording and included all of the unnecessary filler words used by participants (Riessman, 1993). These were the transcripts that were sent to the participants. The interviews were then transcribed for a second time, however the false starts and filler words were left out (Riessman, 1993). Once the participants had reviewed the transcripts, the data analysis begun.

Axial Coding and Comparative Analysis

I began with an "open coding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 86) of data which was uncovered through "studying transcripts repeatedly" with "rigorous and systematic reading" to allow the major categories to surface organically (Thomas, 2006, p. 239). Using this system, I uncovered the three main categories to sort the open codes into

that were 21st century socialization, 21st century schooling, and social capital and virtual social capital. I then began an axial coding of the data (Creswell, 2013). Axial coding involves finding codes that are “crosscutting or relating concepts to each other” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). Axial coding helps to “refine and differentiate concepts” and to develop the relationships that exist in the data (Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2000/2004, p. 272). A coding sample can be found in Appendix B. A “constant comparative” (Creswell, 2013, p. 86) method of analysis was also used to better understand how the participants’ opinions compared and contrasted with each other. I then looked at their Instagram accounts and went through and made notes about each of the participants pictures, captions, hashtags, and virtual social capital, and coded that accordingly. In the end I decided this data would best be presented in its own section, and this concludes chapter 4.

Negative Case Study Analysis

Negative case study analysis involves “addressing and considering alternate interpretations of the data” with a special focus on the pieces of data that would disprove or argue the researcher’s interpretation of the phenomena (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 121). Lincoln and Guba (1984) describe this as the “process of revising hypotheses with hindsight” as the researcher must try to refine his or her hypothesis until it can account for “all known cases without exception” (p. 309). Kidder (1981) clarifies this idea by recounting a study done in the 1950s to which the researcher reformulated and modified his hypothesis five times before he arrived at his conclusion. Kidder explains how the researcher used a negative case study analysis to continually test his hypothesis against all of the sources of data he had obtained, and

in doing so was able to eliminate all of the outliers and exceptions until his hypothesis fit the data (1981). Negative case study analysis aims to eliminate the number of exceptional cases, but there are a lot of difficulties in finding results with zero exceptionalities (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). While this should be the goal in any research, Lincoln and Guba explain that it is very difficult to accomplish a study where the hypothesis fits 100% of the data, and Erlandson et al. (1993) agree and add that it is “unlikely” that there will be this type of agreement between the data and the hypothesis (p. 121). Nevertheless, a negative case study examination was conducted of the three categories and supporting themes in an effort to fit all data into clear hypotheses that are addressed in chapter 5.

Efforts to Establish Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1984) highlight four major areas of concern for establishing trustworthiness in inquiry that include truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. They write that these established terms have different names in the scientific community, including internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Guba (1981) also notes that the naturalistic term for these aspects include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree of verisimilitude and authenticity that the results from a study will carry (Guba, 1981). Guba and Lincoln (1989) believe member checking to be the “single most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 239), and member checking was used to confirm that accurate information about the participants was submitted for the study. Each participant was told about the

member-checking process through the letter of invitation, through each consent form, and was also told again in person either through clarifying the consent forms, or by the assent script if the participant was a minor. The participants knew well in advance that they would have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview, and also that they would have 2 weeks from the day the transcript was sent to submit any changes. Once the transcripts were complete, each participant was emailed a copy of their interview and told again that if there was anything that they felt uncomfortable with or did not wish to have in the interview, that they were to send an email back with the details and it would immediately be taken out of the interview.

Establishing trust. Establishing trust with the participants is essential when conducting any research. Lincoln and Guba (1984) write that the researcher must build trust with each individual interviewee and that trust along with respect from the interviewee could help ensure that the responses are “candid and forthcoming” (p. 256). In 1979, the Belmont Report was created which outlined general ethical recommendations for the researcher to implement, including three basic categories of ethical concerns including “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice” (Vollmer & Howard, 2010, p. 679). Researchers must respect the participants in the study and be sensitive to their needs, must take all precautions to minimize the risks and/or harm to the participants, and must ensure that their methods are considerate and also that the people who participate in the study will benefit from the results (Lapan et al., 2011); this study took these considerations into account in several ways.

Respect was shown to the participants throughout the interview process and actions were taken during the interview to minimize any physical or verbal cues that

would influence the participants' responses (Lapan et al., 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The interview questions were thoughtfully constructed and attention was paid to both the wording and content as not to directly mention subject matter that would embarrass or hurt the participants' emotional well-being. As the interview opened with asking the participants' about themselves, including their hobbies and interests, I was able to further solidify my rapport with the participants. I expressed a sincere interest in their life and hobbies and even made a few jokes to help them feel comfortable. Additionally, the participants were continually reminded that data would be kept anonymous through my continual and conscious choice to use their pseudonym throughout the interview.

Shenton (2004) also speaks to creating trust with participants and writes that tactics to encourage honesty include giving the participants opportunities to withdraw so that only those who are truly interested provide their answers. In this study, the ability to withdraw was stated several times through the letter of invitation, the parental consent form and informed consent form, and was also stated in person via the assent script.

Triangulation. Triangulation was also used to establish the trustworthiness criteria. Triangulation is a “means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws” and can include the use of “multiple data sources” to do so (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). This can also include making use multiple “methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). This research has a triangulation of data that included the transcripts from the interviews, pictures from the participants' Instagram account, captions and comments from the

participants' Instagram accounts, hashtags used on the Instagram accounts, and also the reflective journal kept by the researcher. Further, as themes emerged from coding these data, the participants' own responses were continually triangulated with each other using constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

This research was also peer debriefed by two individuals to add to the triangulation of data to ensure credibility (Creswell, 2013). Peer debriefing is used to enrich the credibility of the findings in qualitative research by helping to uncover and eliminate any researcher bias and provide feedback (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Merriam, 1998). The two individuals were chosen for their experience with qualitative work; one holds an M.A. in critical sociology and another is a recent graduate of an M.Ed. program. These peers initially reviewed the interview question instrument, and their feedback can be found in Appendix D. These peers later reviewed the axial codes that resulted from the open coding of the data, the thick description of the Instagram pictures and posts and how they related to the axial codes, and also reviewed a thick description of pieces from the reflective journal.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ways in which the results from the inquiry can be applied to other contexts and remain relevant (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). A “thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny” is provided for this study to ensure the readers understood both the virtual and physical contexts that were investigated (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). The participants member checked their interviews so that the data gathered was truthful to their beliefs, and data collected from their profiles are thoroughly explained in the report to maximize the readers' understanding of the

phenomena. Writing these descriptions in detail allows for an easier the application of these results to other situations. If the provided thick descriptions manifest a likeness that is shared between two contexts, then it is possible for the reader to suppose the findings from the first context can be applied to the second context (Guba, 1981).

Dependability

Unfortunately, due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, this study is not dependable under all circumstances; it would be difficult to obtain the exact same results if this study were to be recreated. Steps were taken to ensure that this study is as dependable as qualitative work can be, and this involved following the preexisting criteria for dependability. To create dependability, the procedures followed by the researcher should be described in detail to allow for other researchers to recreate the study (though they might not attain similar results) (Shenton, 2004). To accomplish this, the research implementation and design are thoroughly explained to facilitate an in-depth understanding of how the interviews were planned and conducted.

Descriptions of how data was gathered are also included and a “reflective appraisal of the project” is used to evaluate the usefulness of the inquiry process, strengths and weaknesses of the project, and future considerations (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the level of objectivity of the research and the findings. This can be accomplished through methods of triangulation and through the keeping of a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Guba (1981) also discusses arranging for a confirmability audit in which an external agent evaluates whether or not the interpretations made by the researcher are valid. As discussed, two individuals

with research experience reviewed the interview questions and each of their feedback was taken into consideration when revising the final draft of the question. These peers also debriefed the coding process, and reviewed the results of the study to help ensure the objectivity of the findings.

Ethics Clearance

Through ensuring this research follows established standards for work with human participants, ethical considerations have been addressed in order to protect the participants. Brock University's Research Ethics Board (REB) cleared this study in December 2014 (file #: 14-087 – BROWN). The REB approved the interview questions, the informed consent form for participants 18 years of age and older, the parental consent form with a minor assent signature added, and the minor assent script. The interviews were conducted at a university in Southern Ontario, and the participants brought either the signed consent form or signed parental consent form with them to the interview. I went over the consent forms with the participants in detail to ensure that they understood their right not to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with. I then read the assent forms to the participants who were under the age of 18, which further explained how I became interested in social media and schooling, and gave more reasons as to why I felt this project was important.

Ethical Considerations

Because I was asking the participants questions about school and their personal social media use, I realized that these questions had the potential to make the students feel uncomfortable or concerned during the interview. I stated this risk on the letter of invitation, on both of the consent forms, and within the assent script, and

explained each time that if the participant indicated that he or she felt uncomfortable, that we would stop recording the interview right away, and nothing the participant said while the tape recorder was off would be used as data for the project. Further, I had the phone numbers of two local mental health lines (Distress Centre Niagara and COAST Niagara) with me, and informed the participant of their right to use the phone numbers of these lines at any time if they felt they needed to reach out and talk to someone due to the stress of the interview.

Each participant chose a pseudonym before the interview, and all data on that participant was filed according to their chosen name. Upon completion, each interview was transcribed and member checked. The participants were also told on the consent forms that feedback about the study would be available in May 2015 if he or she requested it, and they could use my contact information provided through either our e-mail correspondence, or the contact information provided on the consent forms and letter of invitation.

The participants were informed that the audio recording of the interview would be deleted upon completion of the interview transcript, and that data would be kept secure on a password protected computer. Participants were also informed that in the event that they decided to withdraw, any written data collected (including the signature forms) would be shredded, and any audio recordings will be immediately deleted. Data were stored on the researchers' password protected computer and the consent forms along with anecdotal notes were kept in a file in a locked office. Data were restricted to the student researcher and the faculty supervisor, and this was indicated on all forms; the parents did not have access to these data.

The participants were made aware of the benefits of participation on all of the forms, the most pertinent benefit being the opportunity to express and share their own ideas about SNS use and its relationship to the new socialization experience of 21st century schooling. This research project not only benefits the academic community but can help current teachers to better understand the phenomena of virtual identities and the importance that this demographic places on SNS use, and the participants were also made aware of that on the letter of invitation, on both the parental consent forms, and in the assent script.

Limitations of the Study

There were many limitations to this study that need to be recognized. As this is my first time conducting a qualitative research study, I do not have significant experience to guide or to help inform my choices for this study. Further, the participant sampling was not random, and the small number of participants that I had access to may not be representative of larger or even different populations. Additionally, this research focuses on personal technologies and social media, and the reality is that not every student has access to these mediums. This study also examines the popular SNS Instagram to which participation on this medium largely relies on access to personal technology. While Instagram can be accessed from the computer, users cannot post photos to their Instagram account unless they are using the application on their mobile device. While Instagram is the number one SNS among teens, there are no data that speak to exactly how many Canadian teenagers have access Instagram, or for that matter how many Canadian teenagers own a smart phone to access Instagram. Thus the participants' experiences, opinions, and beliefs

in regards to personal technology and Instagram do not represent every student currently enrolled in high school, and the results of this study cannot be generalized to fit the entire demographic of connected learners. Additionally, several research questions pertain to virtual identity and the school sphere, and school board policies on SNS use and personal technologies in the classroom can vary from school to school. The varying school policies in Ontario are another layer and limitation to the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study set out to examine the virtual identities of 21st century students and how they manifest within the synergy and socialization of the physical school sphere. This study also aimed to ascertain whether or not personal technologies have influenced students' perceptions of schooling in the 21st century. Six participants were recruited using purposive sampling and were interviewed on an individual basis. Data were collected from the participants' public Instagram accounts, and a reflective researcher's journal was also kept throughout the process to help ensure a triangulation of data. This chapter begins with basic background information on the six participants, and then moves into a discussion of data using three specific categories that emerged intuitively from an initial open coding. These categories for the chapter include 21st century socialization, social capital and virtual social capital, and learning in 21st century schools. The final section of this chapter examines the participants' personal Instagram accounts, and is divided up by each participant's name to provide a summary of their online performances. This chapter presents important points from the interviews, and a detailed analysis and relation of these findings to theory will follow in chapter five.

Participants' Hobbies and Interests

Hermione, Gerald, Blair, Michael, Veronica, and Phoenix are teenagers from across Southwestern Ontario. Phoenix is 15 years old and is in grade 10, Veronica and Blair are both 16 years old and in grade 11, Hermione and Gerald are both 17 and in grade 12, and Michael is 19 and graduated high school 6 months ago. All six participants attend different schools and a close examination of their public Instagram

accounts suggests that participants do not know each other. Phoenix considers herself an activist and her interests include animal rights and helping to organize protests in her local community. Veronica loves to sing and play guitar while Blair shared that she loves art and hopes to attend the Ontario Centre for Art and Design when she graduates. Gerald identified as a “music man” and a “poet,” while Hermione has recently been accepted to university for concurrent education specializing in art. Michael loves the genre of pop punk and collecting vinyl records, and he has recently gotten into professional photography that he regularly posts to his Instagram account. It should be noted that all participants identified social media use as either a hobby or an interest.

21st Century Socialization

This is the largest and most comprehensive section of the findings that addresses data related to 21st century socialization. The first section addresses what participants identify as the negative aspects to social media use, and these attitudes arose organically from asking the participants how they felt about social media. The importance of pictures is then unpacked through interrogating students’ positions on the significance of picture taking, and this will lead into an examination of pressures and expectations they feel are placed on social media users. Perceptions of gendered performances are reviewed and this section finishes with a discussion on issues of bullying and the conflict that participants feel is embedded on social media culture.

Negatives to SNS Use

All participants had mixed reactions when asked how they felt about social media; none of the participants spoke consistently positively or negatively about the

implications of these mediums, and all spoke to both perspectives without being prompted. Initially participants shared that it was a great way to stay connected to people and learn more about ideas, concepts, and places; however, each participant addressed his or her own perspective of the negatives to social media use. Phoenix likes social media but is very worried about the influence that celebrity culture, social status, and the media have on her demographic through social media. She explains that a lot of the glamorous images of celebrities and models that saturate social media “mak[e] a lot of people feel like shit about themselves because they are not that.” Phoenix sees a lot of her girlfriends try to emulate the popular images that are made popular by such SNSs as Instagram, and this frustrates her.

While Phoenix’s concerns focus on the pressure that is on her demographic to perform, Hermione, Michael, and Gerald spoke directly to how they perceive false performances of others as the biggest negative to social media. Like Phoenix, Hermione has noticed how these media influence the performances of others, and she thinks negatively of the “different sides of people” that she sees online and is critical of their portrayed online personas. She went on to elaborate that 55-60% of people that she knows are different on their Instagram accounts versus how they are in real life, and this disconnect frustrates her. Michael’s concerns mirrored Hermione’s as he too felt that 50-60% of people who use social media are different in real life, to which he stated that navigating these different personas was the biggest negative to social media. Gerald agreed as he also felt that “for the amount of people who use social media, there are way more people who are not genuine on social networking and act differently than they would in real life.” Like Hermione and Michael, he also feels

frustrated that people can be so disingenuous with their online performances, which negatively influences his views on social media use.

Veronica agrees that people behave differently online, but feels that it is solely the female gender that posts in a way that is different from how they are in real life. She feels that girls make themselves look different in their photos, and that girls “want to put their input on everything” by commenting on statuses and posts on various SNSs. This frustrates her because she feels that girls are the sole cause of conflict online and are not truthful to the person that they are; this is Veronica’s biggest frustration with SNS use.

In Blair’s response to how she felt about social media, she brought up a negative that partially relates to the idea of truthful performances. Blair said that there is a “hate aspect” of social media in which cyber bullying through social media is a huge issue that many of her peers participate in. Cyber bullying will be discussed in an upcoming category in this section.

Photographs and Popularity

The importance of pictures to 21st century identity was discussed in each interview, and using photos to perform popularity was a common theme when discussing the taking and posting of photos. Gerald shared that pictures were very important to social media use because they show every part of one’s life and “it depends on the person, but in the generality of people [sic], they will post everything.” Gerald believes that social media encourages its users to share their lives through pictures, and Hermione expanded on that idea, explaining that “sometimes you feel the pressure to have a picture with a bunch of people just to be like ‘Oh I was

with all of these people' . . . like you need to take a picture to show it off in a way."

Sometimes she will post a photo not just because she thinks it is fun, but also because she feels pressured to take photos to post about the people that she is with. Even if she does not want to go out, her friends will remind her of the fact that they "can get some good friend pictures" and then that becomes the motivation to do activities. She elaborates on this importance by stating that she

know[s] that if you go to a party that all you'll see is people taking pictures—it's less about socializing and more about "who did you take a picture with?" . . . it's like to capture the moment of "Oh I was with them" kind of thing, and it's more valuable than actually talking to them in a way, because it's like "Oh I got a picture with them" so then you post it and it's like "Oh I was with them" kind of thing, so I feel like that's a huge influence on people.

Sharing pictures allows users to show others who they have talked with, and Hermione said that "the more pictures you show with people, the more it seems like 'Oh she's very social, she talks to all of these people'" and this image of popularity is a very desirable one for social media users to portray. Blair agrees and adds that people want to present themselves in a way that shows that they "have a life" and a "big friend group." Michael also confirmed this by saying that the "popular kids" at his high school were the ones who always posted pictures of themselves at parties talking to the most people. He said that "even if everyone doesn't like them, they are perceived as popular" because of the photos they post. He actually wondered if perhaps the photos that they posted were one of the reasons that these people were ever considered/seen as popular. As he felt that not many people respected those who

his school considered “popular,” he hypothesized that perhaps their popularity was created by the hype that their pictures created.

Blair said that she sees a lot of people that engage in activities just so they can take photos and post about it, and sometimes she thinks that her friends ask her to go out because they “just want the picture for Instagram.” This also came up in Michael’s interview, as he too knows people who hang out with others for the sole purpose of taking pictures. While he maintained that he has personally never done this, he shared that a lot of people are motivated to spend time with other based on taking pictures for Instagram.

Influence of photo opportunities. Phoenix says that her life is also very influenced by opportunities to take pictures, and explained a dilemma that she faces when at a concert:

I’ll be there and I’ll be like “Should I sit back and just videotape this song so I can post it online, so I can brag about it to other people, or should I just be involved and just enjoy it in the moment?” And you know what Mary, sometimes I’ll choose to sit back and just videotape the one song or step back just to take the picture.

As she described, Phoenix finds herself conflicted when faced with the choice and opportunities to take photos. Further, she said that when she goes to concerts she tries not to wreck her hair or makeup until a photo is taken of her there. Once the photo is taken she feels relieved and free to go into the crowd and does not care about what she looks like. Phoenix uses the photo to perform her identity and project the most

desirable image of herself. Here, she is motivated to take the photo so that she can share it with others, relating back to the themes of popularity and online interactions.

Gerald also used the example of seeing a concert when talking about pictures, as he said that “instead of watching it, I’ll record it to watch it later.” This choice does not bother him and (unlike Phoenix) he does not feel conflicted about it as he looks forward to capturing the moment because he feels he will hold that moment forever. Michael also explained that he was at a concert the day before the interview and “in a small venue with 40-50 people, about 20-30 of them were on their phones and filming—myself included.”

Gerald disclosed another way that he is influenced by the opportunity to take photos, as he admitted that he tried smoking and will smoke a cigarette just so he can take a picture of it to post to social media. He explains:

I’ve smoked cigarettes before just so they would be in the photo, which is kind of like, stupid and douchey [sic], but I think it’s funny like “Hey look at me smoking a cigarette.” I do it as like an ironic thing . . . over a long period of time people would get it.

While Gerald said that he does not smoke, he explains that he just poses with cigarettes socially because he finds it ironic. He further adds that any picture of him posing for anything on Instagram should be taken as a “joke” and not taken seriously, although he recognizes that many people who look at his Instagram would not understand that these images are intended as a joke.

Setting up the moment. Phoenix shared that when she is at an event or out somewhere that she will often “stand back and watch people and just set [the

moment] up and then take a picture and then it's like 'Okay, I got the picture, it's posted, now I can go and do my own thing'" with the same sense of relief she feels after taking photos of herself at concerts. She also explained that on an everyday basis when she is making a meal that she wants to share with others that she is influenced to "make it look pretty" so that she can post it to social media.

Phoenix's experiences are similar to Veronica who expressed the same sense of desire to set up the perfect moment to take a photograph. She too describes that when she makes a meal she will set it up beautifully, take the photo, and then "just wreck it all" without a care for the aesthetic after the photo has been taken. She has also done activities with her friends just so they could take a picture of it and post it on social media. She shares that her friends and herself used to dress up in ridiculous clothing and go out in nature and take pictures. She does this to evoke reactions from others as "That's what we do. Not for like the actual look of it to be cool, but just because it's ridiculous and everyone's gonna look twice at it and be like 'what are you doing?'" Her explanation specifically mentions how the reactions from others are the motivations behind taking the photos.

Overall, all participants unanimously expressed being influenced by the photos they take or the photos that others take for the purposes of posting to social media and/or to get reactions from others. The users control what images they post of themselves, and are continually aware of how to project and share a desirable image of themselves or their activities. In these cases, users take photos with others to project an image of popularity, and that can become the motivation to spend time with others or engage in activities.

Pressures From Social Media

All participants spoke of pressures that they felt when using social media, and most of this pressure stemmed from the expectation of other users. Gerald explained that “social media as a whole is a very weird maze of rights and wrongs and hates and likes and thumbs up and thumbs down” and “that’s what it is.” Hermione spoke about the pressure on social media users to take photos with others, but also the pressures on her demographic to perform their identities using different embodied “personas.” She talked about the different guises that her Instagram using friends put on even though she thinks to herself “you’re not actually like that though” when she sees the content of their Instagram profile. She shares that “the more followers you have, the more people you want to impress” and added that she has seen people become their illusory online persona in real life because there is a “pressure to be a certain way.” She also knows many people who have thousands of Instagram followers that behave in a way that is different than who they are (or were) in real life. She believes that everyone who uses social media feels pressure to share photos to get “likes” and this is in order to impress others with photos.

Blair shared similar sentiments about pressures on users to take and share photos. She has friends who obsess over their Instagram use as they “feel pressure to keep up this kind of reputation on social media” which causes them to “continue to act a certain way.” While she said that she personally does not feel pressure from her Instagram account to post photos, she has noticed a mentality amongst her demographic in that they must continually post about the interesting things they do. She explains that “people almost expect you to be posting about it, because why

wouldn't you?" She thinks that Instagram has a set of embedded expectations from other users that encourage frequent posts about everything from events to activities, and others' expectations are why the majority of her friends frequently post to Instagram. Blair thinks critically of these expectations, which is why she does not feel the need to continually post, but she acknowledges that not everyone holds her views, especially not her closest friends.

Like Blair's friends, Gerald shared that he personally feels pressure to continually perform through photos on Instagram. He explains that

If I'm just sitting at home and I haven't posted a photo in like 3 days to Instagram—just because nothing's come up or nothing that I wanted to post has come up—legitimately the first opportunity that you have to take a photo of something that you want to post or that you think is cool or that you think displays yourself, or that you think is funny, you'll take it, and you'll post it, just because you haven't.

He will take a picture of something just so that he can post something to his Instagram and keep up his frequent participation; keeping up his profile ensures that he is "not losing people's interest" which he feels at risk of doing without frequently posting.

Like Gerald, Michael also talked about the importance of not losing people's interest in his Instagram page. He said that "upholding your Internet persona" is important because "as soon as you stop using [social media], you might become less relevant." He said that he "think[s] for sure everybody feels that pressure to keep up with their social media" and that just the other day a friend remarked that Michael had

been “slacking on my Twitter” use, to which Michael thought he should go and update it immediately. According to Michael, the thought of continually posting is “something in the back of your mind that keeps you kind of wanting to keep up with it.”

It would appear that performing popularity through photos is also linked with feeling pressure from others to take and post photos. Thus, to meet these perceived expectations while maintaining the interest of others, students have come up with many ways to maximize their popularity online, including creating certain habits of social media use to maximize the impact their online identity’s and content will have.

Social Media Rituals

Blair shared that her friends not only worry about frequently posting to keep others interested, but they also make sure that they do not post too many photos at a certain time; some have told Blair that they would never post two photos in one day to their Instagram accounts as not to “spam” their followers with photos. In terms of how they use the medium, Blair shares that one of her best friends will also “schedule a certain time as to when she’s gonna post her picture,” to which Blair did not understand the logic behind it. The practice of scheduling times to post a photo was actually addressed in Michael’s interview as he too schedules times and plans when he will post his pictures to Instagram ahead of time. Michael shared that he has preferred hours of when he likes to post pictures to Instagram as he has isolated Instagram’s “prime time” in which he has noticed more people are on and actively using the medium. Michael aims to post his photos either within a 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. window or from 4:00 p.m. to 6 p.m. At the time of our interview, he disclosed that he had just seen two of his favourite bands play the day before in Toronto and he

had four edited photos waiting to be posted in these peak times; posting those photos during the peak hours increases their chances of getting seen by more people and consequently getting more likes.

Blair also shared that she has friends who say “I can’t have this amount of pictures on my Instagram” which Blair did not understand; however, this was actually addressed and explained in Hermione’s interview. Despite posting a photo almost every day to Instagram, Hermione never goes over 100 photos being displayed on her account page at a time. She says that she continually deletes photos especially if they are of herself because she “feel[s] a little conceited” if there are too many. Thus “after a month I tend to go through my Instagram and delete pictures like I just feel aren’t necessary.” She maintains it is more “reasonable” to keep her picture count under 100, and wants to always “keep it current” and up to date with her life which leads her to delete her pictures.

Blair shared that she thinks the obsession that her friends have about their Instagram posting comes from a desire to maintain a high follower count. The majority of people that she knows “associate how often you post with follower counts and like ‘Oh, I don’t want to lose my followers by not posting enough times a week’” which is why they feel the need to continually post. Gerald and Michael confirmed this by saying that they feel the need to frequently post to keep people’s interest in them. Phoenix also agrees that this pressure to frequently post is there, and feels that a lot of teenagers are simply in a time of their life when they are easily influenced by things such as likes on photos and follower counts.

It seems that students perform through photos in order to be perceived as

popular in real life by their peers, and they continue to post interesting content daily to appear popular online. Students perceive these rituals of posting at certain times, not posting too many times in one day, and only having 100 posts displayed at a time as strategies that impact their popularity in some capacity be it online or in real life.

Differences in Gendered Performances

Many issues surfaced that were much deeper than the frequency of posts when discussing the pressures on social media users. Participants discussed gender performances and societal gender roles in detail, providing many perspectives on how specifically the female gender performs through pictures on SNSs like Instagram. Obviously the notion that gender exists in a male–female binary has been disproven, but it is within this heteronormative matrix that the participants have positioned their views on gender identity and roles (Butler, 1988); consequently it is with the simplistic dichotomy of male and female terminology that this section will discuss participants’ attitudes on gendered performances.

Within the first 3 minutes of the interview, Hermione mentioned that a lot of people behave online in a way that is different from how they are in person; her use of “people” soon turned into “girls” as she explained this further. She explained that on Instagram she sees girls “posting more sexual posts and pictures of themselves ... posting little clothing and some girls post in [their] bikinis all time and that’s not how they are.”

She also added that “some girls act very, for lack of a better word, dumb and they dumb themselves down when they’re actually smart.” She believes that

followers could influence the actions of these girls, especially if they have male followers, and this is because she feels that girls want to impress the guy followers.

Like Hermione, Veronica spoke very unfavourably about other girls who use social media and also shared that she thought that girls dumbed themselves down online. She says that girls do this because “they think that guys want dumb girls better than smart girls.” Like Hermione, Veronica thinks that attracting the opposite sex, or just being more attractive to their desired gender, is the main motivation. Veronica said that she feels that an average of 60% of girls perform in this way for this type of attention. When asked about the attention that girls who post more provocative photos receive, Veronica said that boys are “all over that, but they’ll talk bad about her afterwards” and “that’s what guys do” because “boys will be boys.”

Veronica feels that a lot of conflict involving girls happens over Facebook, and expressed that guys perform differently on this medium because they “are not really the arguing type.” She said that there is “so much drama between every single girl it’s ridiculous” but there is not for guys. Guys do not act dumb on social media and that they do not “g[o] off about dumb things that don’t even really matter” like their female counterparts. She said that guys post things like skateboarding and hanging with their friends while girls only post selfies and food.

Here, both Veronica and Hermione directly address their female peers’ online performances of femininity by identifying a “stylized repetition of acts” that include repetitively performing their appearance in a certain way through photos (Butler, 1988, p. 270). They believe that girls use their photos and profile content as a performance to attract their desired sex, even if they do not perform that way in

person. The perceived repetition of these behaviours has led Hermione and Veronica to identify a distinction in how males post versus how females post. This distinction is also informed by Veronica's feeling that arguing/causing conflict is not characteristic of males, and that males do not perform in a way to attract the attention of others.

In contrast, Phoenix is very concerned about how girls in her age group perform their appearance through pictures. She describes modeling pages on Instagram that send a message to girls that "you have to look like this, you have to look and act in a certain way" both online and in real life, and that upsets her. She says that girls in her age group are "getting all of these messages subliminally" and

when we don't meet these standards we feel like shit about ourselves so we go and buy another beauty product, or another thing to make ourselves feel better and when that doesn't work we go and buy another one, and it's because of these social media sites that are telling us to act like that.

Phoenix shared that she has recently been following a lot of "body positive" Instagram accounts and blogs that encourage people to be happy with and love their bodies, and she tries not to surround herself with the negative and body-shaming images that she described. She believes that her age group has not learned how to think critically about the images that they see, and that these pressures can impact females more than males on social media.

Like Phoenix, Blair feels that it is the same patriarchal expectations placed on women in society that "translates from real life onto social media." She explains that girls are pressured to look a certain way in their Instagram photos because "as a girl,

you're expected to have like 'pretty selfies' on your Instagram and stuff like that whereas boys it's like 'I'm gonna post a picture of like this hotdog and no one really cares.'" In society girls are expected to be "pretty and ethereal [sic]" and she believes that a lot of girls who use social media try to live up to those imposed expectations. She does not think that guys put in as much effort on their social media accounts as girls, and she also does not think that they are expected to either. Phoenix confirmed this by saying that guys do not always have a lot of likes and it matters less about the virtual social capital of their accounts. In contrast, Phoenix says that "with girls, if you want to know something about them then just check the amount of likes on any profile picture." Veronica said the same thing as if you look "at another girl's social media site, if they have a lot of friends, a lot of likes, you know they're popular and you wanna be friends with them—that's how every person thinks now and it's kind of ridiculous."

Blair and Phoenix identify the same repetitious actions that females use to perform through photos as Hermione and Veronica. In these cases, the two groups of girls offer different perspectives as to why they think females perform in this way; Blair and Phoenix suggest that societal expectations influence female performances, while Hermione and Veronica believe that attracting the desired sex is the motivating factor. Blair and Phoenix do address male performativity and imply that male social media users have different expectations placed on them than their female counterparts.

In contrast to the females in this study, Gerald and Michael did not have much to contribute to the discussion of gendered performances. Gerald said that he could

not really talk about female performances because “I’m not a female, right?” and felt that everyone can portray themselves differently as “you can essentially be whoever you want online without it actually being you.” Michael said that he has not really noticed a difference in how the two genders perform, but he feels like there would be more pressure on girls; he just could not articulate why he felt that way.

Gerald and Michael’s inability to articulate specific differences in gendered performances is noticeably different than the female participants. This is perhaps exemplary of the different expectations on male social media users that Blair, Phoenix, and Veronica specifically address. Blair stated that she feels males are under less pressure to perform than females, and Phoenix specifically said that a male’s online social media accounts matter less to his social status than a female counterparts’.

Self-Representation on SNSs

Gerald feels that his Facebook account accurately represents him, but he feels that he has to censor a lot of his Facebook use based on how many people can access the profile. He explained that the world can see your Facebook account, and that even if you make it private there are still ways for someone somewhere to see it. Because of his self-censorship, he thinks that someone could tell more about him when looking at his Instagram account over his Facebook account, stating that “I feel like I can express himself more on Instagram than I ever could on Facebook.” He does feel that he is genuine on Facebook, but he only highlights the parts that he feels are favorable; he explains that “a part of me is immature” but he will not post things that reflect immaturity as to maintain a positive image of himself. He also feels that

because of his attentiveness to his image, he has “rarely been unaccepted online” or gotten into fights with people over what he posts. He says that it is “more socially acceptable” to perform his identity on Instagram and that he can highlight his goofy side thus showcasing who he feels he really is.

Phoenix does not think that someone could look at her social media pages like her Facebook and Instagram and accurately know things about her. She thinks that her photos “may give people the wrong idea” because she feels like there is a lot more to her other than going to parties and concerts, which is what she mostly posts. She feels that she is “more intelligent than a lot of people would know” because she does not use her Instagram for such things as posting articles or worldly opinions and instead “post[s] pictures of when I go out” which “makes it look like I have a fun life, which is not the only life I have.” Similarly Michael shared that all of his social media accounts combined would accurately depict who he was, but he “can definitely say that I have very different personas even just within the different social medias.” He uses Twitter to show his goofy side, whereas he likes to keep it more serious on his Instagram because he posts a lot of original and artistic photography.

Bullying/Conflict on Social Media

The participants’ concern about the conflict created by social media arose in some capacity during every interview. When discussing social media, Blair described that “a lot of people find it easier to say mean things or things you usually wouldn’t say in real life to someone online because you’re kind of hidden behind the screen.” Blair feels that this is a negative to using social media and being continually

connected to everyone, and Phoenix adds that “a lot of bullies are hiding behind their computer screens and cell phones nowadays.”

Blair shared that there would “be a lot less hatred towards other people” if students did not use social media, to which Phoenix adds that “kids would actually enjoy themselves” instead of worrying about being bullied on social media if it did not exist. One of the reasons that Veronica dislikes social media is “because a lot of people are just mean to everyone on it and they just want to start fights.” She explained that a lot of fights originate from Facebook and that she is annoyed by all of the “evil statuses” that people make and the mean comments that some leave on each other’s posts.

Twitter and Facebook came up as the two most prominent SNSs that cause conflict. Blair said a lot of people have “Twitter beef” with each other, which means a conflict that originated through the online SNS Twitter. Michael elaborated on this and shared that he too has had Twitter beef with others. Just the other day he “called out” a girl on social media who made an offensive tweet saying that girls should not take provocative photos of themselves because “what would their boyfriends think?” Michael replied to the girl by saying “it doesn’t matter what their boyfriends think, girls can do what they want” which caused a bitter exchange of words to be tweeted between them. Michael said that if someone else posts something that he finds inappropriate (i.e., anything racist or homophobic) to any social media that he will intervene either through commenting or directly messaging the person to let him or her know why he does not approve of the content of their post. Hermione shared that the “popular” kids at her school use Twitter to make fun of other people at her school

and that they tweet out “personal things that you wouldn’t want people knowing”; even if they do not include the name directly in the Tweet, it is always obvious to her schoolmates who the tweet is about. Phoenix shared that this was also a problem at her school as several of her peers tweet things about other people and that when a person tweets about someone but does not include their name, it is called a “subtweet.”

Learned Diplomacy

Gerald feels that there is a lot on conflict on Facebook as there is always “five ways to interpret someone’s sentence” that you read as opposed to having the context of the sentence in a face-to-face conversation. He feels that he “has to be wary of everybody’s different factions, groups, and different interests because if you offend some people then that could look bad to you [sic].” Gerald puts a lot of thought into his posts, and tries to be very diplomatic online as not to cause conflict. Michael also expressed a sense of learned online diplomacy as he shared that “before you tweet something, even before you post something, you have to think how others are going to perceive this.” Like Gerald, he does not like that it is easy to misinterpret what other people say, and he is careful about what he posts for that reason. He says that there is a lot of “drama” that can come from social media, and he added that he believes that life without social media “is probably less stressful.”

Public and Private

All participants have a public Instagram profile and have thought critically at some point about the types of content they post to all of their SNSs. Gerald explained how he interprets the public and private spheres of SNS use:

So for me, with Facebook, I use coarse language but I tend to shy away from it for the most part because you're literally presenting yourself as a person to the whole world, and the entire world, and everyone can see your Facebook—and you can make your Facebook as private as you want and people will still be able to link something towards you, right? Like whatever I'm commenting on, I would never use racial slurs as a joke on Facebook and I would never post a picture of me underage drinking or doing anything stupid or using drugs or talking about drugs ... because you're presenting yourself to the world.

Like Gerald, Veronica expressed that that she filters her participation on every SNS medium as she stated “I don't post bad things to any of my accounts because I don't want a future boss to see them.”

Hermione had a slightly different take on her SNS use as she disclosed that her Instagram is where she posts her personal photos and that she keeps it very “impersonal” on Facebook. She feels she has too many friends on Facebook and does not want them all to see what she is doing whereas her Instagram following is made mostly of her current friends who use the medium so she posts to update them. In contrast to Gerald and Veronica, Hermione does have photos of herself engaging in underage drinking with her friends on Instagram and also of herself skipping school. In the same way, Phoenix explains how she negotiates displays of her behaviour through her social media accounts by explaining, “Facebook is a little more personal for me, but that's because the only friends I have on Facebook are the people I know in real life versus Instagram I have followers that are strangers to me.” In contrast to

Gerald and Veronica, Phoenix has many photos of herself underage drinking and doing drugs on her Instagram (as opposed to her Facebook), including a photo of two marijuana joints with the caption “I’m sorry mom I had to—these are so huge they had to be shared with the public.” Phoenix said that the content of her Facebook was different than her Instagram, as “not all the stuff I post on Instagram is ‘okay’ for my age group or whatever” whereas her Facebook posts are usually interesting articles and related to activism and outreach. Both Hermione and Phoenix have different takes on their Facebook following (personal versus impersonal) yet they filter their participation in the same way.

Social Capital and Virtual Social Capital

This section of the findings discusses participants’ attitudes of social capital and virtual social capital. This section is divided up to firstly examine the link between likes and self-esteem, then discusses participants’ own personal thresholds when it comes to like counts. Lastly this section examines the described link between virtual social capital and the influence that it has on one’s social capital while in schools.

Likes and Self-Perception

Participants shared their opinions on “likes” and how likes made them feel throughout every interview; unanimously, all participants shared that they enjoyed getting likes and that they are influenced by their like count in some capacity. Even though Hermione asserted that she does not care that much about getting likes on her photos she still “likes getting likes” and posts photos for the sole purpose of getting said likes. Part of the reason she thinks that people portray themselves in a different

way online is so that they too may get more “likes” on their photos, which Gerald shares is part of the “reputation” and “social status” that Instagram accounts can attain. Blair stated that likes matter more to her than a high follower count and that she thinks they are important to everyone. Gerald felt that likes and followers had equal weight, and stressed the importance of receiving an appropriate amount of likes on his photos.

Blair stated a possible link between the number of likes on a photo and her self-esteem as likes “giv[e] you a sort of feeling of validation that you are liked on Instagram” and also “mak[e] you feel good about yourself.” Gerald contributed to this idea by sharing that likes “give you a sense of confidence” and that it is a “number count that makes you higher or above someone else or lower than someone else.” Michael said that when he gets likes on a photo then he feels that people “appreciate” what he is doing, and that likes are “almost like an achievement.” He said that after your photo gets likes, “you can look back on your photos and be like ‘Oh a lot of people like me.’” Phoenix shared parallel ideas by explaining that “the more likes you get, the bigger ego you get” and “the better you feel about yourself.” She disclosed that one time she posted a photo of herself that got 90 likes and she felt “happy about it versus any other” photo that she had posted and she feels that likes can contribute to a person’s self-esteem. Veronica also explained that likes give her “self-confidence.” Like Phoenix, she brought up an experience where she had “gotten almost 300 likes on a profile picture” and that made her feel “beautiful.” Veronica aspires to get likes because they make her feel good, but in contrast if she only receives 11 or 20 likes on a photo then she feels bad about herself.

Soliciting Likes

The importance of likes came up in many ways, including through similar anecdotes told by Blair, Phoenix, and Veronica. The three girls all shared stories about getting texts and messages from others through social media that instruct them to like the last photo that the person has posted. Blair has only ever received these types of messages from her friends, and admits that even she will text her friends to “go and like my last selfie” after she posts it and they will. Veronica and Phoenix get messages from their friend group, but also receive messages from other people, specifically females, that they do not know well or have no close relationship with. Phoenix feels this is a huge problem for her because she will get messages from “random girls that I just happen to have on social media” and she does not feel that it is appropriate for these girls to ask that of her. Veronica shares that it is “so annoying” to get these messages and she always tells the girls to “go like your own photo”. While it is unthinkable to her now, Veronica admits that she used to send these messages to her friends when she was younger, but like Blair would never send the requests to random strangers. She estimates that she probably gets two to three of these requests a week which is anywhere from 80 to 120 in a school year.

Hermione also shared that she used to get messages from her friends when she was younger (about 15 years old) that said to go like their last Facebook display picture; however, she explains how that is not a current or socially acceptable practice for her today. She said that sometimes “as a joke” her friends tell her to go like their last picture, but that those requests are not meant to be serious. Hermione even shared that sometimes her friends will secretly take her phone and go from her social media

account onto theirs to like their own pictures; however, this is done under a joking pretense that she feels is not comparable to the serious requests being asked of Blair, Phoenix, or Veronica.

In contrast, Veronica feels that these requests come most often from random sources as opposed to her friends. She explains that her girlfriends do not request this because it is likely that she will have already liked their photo if they are true friends. She says that if she does not like her friends photos then she feels like she is being a “terrible friend” and that she “want[s] to make them feel good about themselves” and that “if they get a lot of likes they’ll feed good.”

Personal Like “Thresholds”

Without being prompted, each participant shared a personal number or “gauge” that they had for themselves with respect to a certain amount of likes that a photo receives in order for the participant to be satisfied. Blair referred this to this gauge as her “like threshold” and describes an “anxious” feeling after she posts a photo and waits for the appropriate amount of likes to accumulate. She shares that her threshold is different depending on the type of photo she posts because on normal photos it has to reach over 12, but on selfies she thinks “this better get over 20 likes” because “that’s my face!” Hermione shared that her threshold was 11 and that she has deleted photos on numerous occasions that have not gotten a number of likes that are up to her standard. Sometimes she will delete the photo if it does not get enough likes because she thinks that she can “post something better.” Or, often she will post a photo late at night and it will not get a lot of likes, so she will wait until the next day and repost the image “so everyone can see it.” Michael shared similar views as the

few times that he had posted a photo at 2:00 a.m. he found that his photos did not receive that many likes, which is why he now only posts in the prime time hours described earlier. Phoenix also shared that she will delete photos if they get fewer than 11 likes, and Veronica agreed that the number absolutely has to be higher than 11 and preferably over 20.

Gerald appeared very hesitant when discussing the online status that his Instagram account received. He said that “it’s so stupid” and “don’t judge me, Mary” and then proceeded to share that he deletes his photos if they are under 20 likes because “it looks bad to my Instagram rep.” He continued by explaining that if an hour passes and the photo only has 15 likes, he thinks “fuck, no way is this staying” and will delete it quickly. He also talked to me about my Instagram participation and said that I probably “hit the 50 mark” of average likes per photo based on my Instagram follower count; I had never considered it so we looked at my Instagram to check the average like count and he was absolutely correct.

Michael needs at least 20 to 30 likes to feel satisfied with a photo. He says that the lowest amount of likes that he will tolerate is 11, but ideally his photos will get as many likes as they can. Like Hermione and Gerald, he too will delete photos that do not get enough likes, and as discussed, he will aim to post photos in the prime times when he feels more people are using Instagram.

The participants’ likes threshold appears to be similar in some cases. It should be noted that when users post photos to Instagram, the site lists the names of the users who like the photo until 10 people have liked it. After the photo has acquired 11 likes

and over, the medium then quantifies the like number and instead of listing the names it instead shows the number of likes to other users.

Social Status

The social status that the online accounts of these users receive came up in every interview, and participants were split on virtual social capital's relationship to social status. As such, participants offered differing opinions in terms on how online profiles can collect a system of people together that can benefit one's virtual social network.

Michael has actually undergone a transformation in his life that he feels he owes to social media and the virtual social capital that his accounts have. He shared that he is very different now compared to how he was in high school as feels like he has finally “created my own personality” and uses the most desirable image of himself to network. I asked if he thought his social media use and virtual status had anything to do with this transformation, and he said

I'd say for sure. . . . Even I've made a lot of my friends on Twitter because it's so easy to . . . like I can just easily tweet at someone—like even the other day there's this girl I follow on Twitter and I was like “Oh we should be friends” and she was like “Yeah, here's my number” kind of thing, whereas before like it's so much tougher for you to go up to a girl you think is pretty or something . . . there's just so much more—like how you talk, how you present yourself kind of thing—whereas on social media where I'm just an icon and a name I can just be like “Hey!” . . . and you can be the person you want to be—like what you want to say but you don't really have to hold back

because “What have you got to lose?” kind of thing. And I guess that’s where social media comes in and how people create their persona it’s just like “What do I have to lose?”

I asked if he thought that the status of his accounts has helped him reach out to people on those mediums and he said yes because “there’s just so many people I’ve met through those and they would just be like ‘Oh I love your Instagram’ or ‘I love your Twitter’” and he thinks that gives people a different and better view of him.

Gerald also shared that he has met people online and Veronica shared that “I have met so many new people on social media.” All participants stated that they use social media to stay in touch with their friends, and perhaps that in and of itself can be representative of a social capital that they would not have been able to maintain had it not been for the virtual mediums. Hermione shared that “it’s a good way to stay connected to people you know from previous jobs, and just a lot of my friends whenever I need to stay connected to them.” All participants do use social media for social networking purposes.

Virtual social capital and virtual social status. Hermione says that she knows many girls who have very popular social media accounts (with many people networked to that one account) yet do not hold a lot of social status while at school; she would not say that virtual social status and capital always translates into tangible social status. She explained that users

can have very popular accounts—not always with the same people at school though, like you may not be known at school, but on Instagram you can go on and have so many followers around the world that you don’t know, but all of a

sudden you're super popular and have a high account kind of thing, but it doesn't mean that everyone knows you and are popular in person.

Hermione mirrored Blair who said that you could be connected to vast networks of people and have a lot of virtual status online while you are unpopular at school with no networks of people. Gerald has seen this first hand and explained that "people can feel accepted with a lot of people online and then talk to no one in real life and keep to themselves."

While these participants felt that virtual social status does not translate into tangible social status, they agreed that it does work the other way. Phoenix said that all of the "popular" people at her school with the most social capital always have the most online social status and consequently the most virtual social capital. She said that "if you're popular, people will like your posts" and shared that she knows "popular girls" who have posted "going shopping LOL" on their Facebook accounts and gotten over 50 likes for it; they also have the most followers and/or friends (users linked to the profile to attain virtual social capital). She thinks it is very shallow and unfair that social capital at school can translate into virtual social status because in contrast, someone can post a meaningful article or opinion on social media and only get a few likes thereby not reaching or impacting many people. Phoenix believes that those two types of posts should not be weighted the same but they are. Hermione agreed that if you are popular in real life then you are always popular online and Veronica said that if a person has a lot of friends and a lot of likes on their profile then "you know they're popular and you wanna be friends with them." Veronica says "it's kind of ridiculous" but "that's how every person thinks."

Like Blair, Hermione, Phoenix, and Veronica, Gerald shared that if you are popular in real life then you will be popular online, but also explained that if you were unpopular online then your low virtual social status and therefore capital could influence how people treat you. He thinks that having only a few likes on a photo or only a few followers could change the social capital that you hold in the real world. He believes that having a low virtual social capital could influence people to think “that you’re not connected to as many people as so and so, so you’re in a sense of ‘lesser importance.’” Phoenix spoke to this as she said that it is “embarrassing to only get four likes on a photo” and therefore it would be embarrassing to have a low virtual social status that is a result from a low virtual social capital. Blair stood out from Phoenix and Gerald as she said “I don’t really know—that’s one thing—like I’ve seen popularity translate onto social media, but I have not seen someone not having lots of likes on their photo really effect who they are in real life.” No participants have seen low virtual social capital have real life consequences, and Gerald, Blair, and Phoenix were speculating as to what would happen if that was a situation.

Like counts and virtual social status. All participants expressed concern about his or her like count on photos, and Gerald says that the quantifiable like count represents “a competition—like your reputation, your social status.” Blair expanded on that and explained that the desire for likes on a photo has

a root of just wanting to be liked by other people, you know? You want to be liked by people by having likes on your photos and you also don’t want someone to look at your picture and be like “Ha! She only got 11 likes,” you know what I’m saying? It’s a very—like you’re influenced a lot by other

people's opinions with social media; that's where I think most of the pressure on people comes from.

Blair believes that the drive to get more likes is based on wanting to be liked. Blair's humiliation from not getting enough likes mirrors Phoenix's statements on the embarrassment of receiving too little likes.

All participants expressed that having a high follower count, posting photos frequently, getting a lot of likes on photos, and in some cases deleting photos when the number of likes are too low, are desirable traits for a popular account with a lot of virtual social status; essentially, the participants explained that the more virtual status you have the more virtual social capital you will have, although this does not always translate into social status at school. Phoenix also explained a curious dynamic in the motivation to get likes as that the more likes you get on Facebook then "the more pops up in your newsfeed and the more people will like it and the more comments you get." While Instagram does not have the same function (as it merely displays the likes without impacting how much your photo is shared) the fact that Facebook will promote your profile or photo on others' newsfeeds if it has collected a lot of virtual social status to essentially collect more virtual social status is noteworthy.

Learning in 21st Century Schools

This section addresses the findings that relate to 21st century schooling, and begins by assessing students' readiness for the digital world. This moves into assessing if social media is more influential than school, and how participants feel influenced by social media. This section concludes with sharing what students feel they have learned from social media.

Student Readiness for a Digital World

All participants unanimously felt that school was not preparing (or in Michael's case did not prepare) them to meet the new demands of the digital world.

Hermione shared that the curriculum at her school is not contemporary enough, and she is frustrated that nothing feels relevant to her. She explains that "there's history now that we can be learning about, and social issues right now" again adding that classes should focus "on what's important right now because times have changed and we don't need to learn about everything in the past." She said that school tries to make it seem like they adapt a 21st century approach "but just because you use like a digital SMARTboard that's not always helping us; we need to actually learn how to use that for our lives" and that is not the approach that her teachers take. She feels that all of her teachers except her art teacher do not make an effort to include relevant material and real world connections for their students. Hermione made it very clear that she loves learning, stating it several times when discussing school; she just does not "always agree about what we're learning" and feels "we should have more modern things in schools instead of old things."

Blair was in conversation with Hermione's concerns, stating that "the things we learn in school aren't very current" and do not prepare the students for the real world. Blair is learning concepts in class that are not necessarily relevant to her and she would much rather be learning ideas that have a real world application; in math she feels like she could be learning how to budget, to do her taxes, or to pay bills instead of learning about parabolas. Phoenix shared similar ideas as she also said that she does not have a class that teaches students how to do their taxes, and that

there is not a single class in high school that teaches students what they need to know for real life.

Veronica is having difficulties in school right now because she feels the content is “so outdated.” She says that teachers are preparing her to live in “the world that they used to live in” and that what she is learning in school does not reflect the realities of today. She shared that in her Communication and Technology (Com/Tech) class, her teacher is teaching the students how to use a handheld camcorder that seems to be from the late 1980s/early 1990s. She says that “no one needs to know anything about the camcorder because they don’t use them anymore; we need to know things about the technology that we do use.” She took her Com/Tech class as an elective, and now she is struggling to maintain a good mark because she feels so disconnected from the content. Like Hermione, Veronica likes the idea of school and is very thankful that she lives in a country where education is free, but she does not like the majority of her teachers because she feels that they are too old-fashioned and do not teach contemporary things that interest her.

Gerald also shared similar concerns as Hermione, Blair, Phoenix, and Veronica. He said that teachers

do not teach us how to live in the digital world ... see, I wanna say that they teach us how to live in the real world, but that’s not true because the digital world is now part of the real world. School is not preparing us; I feel like already, with my view of things, that the education system is quite corrupt and that it’s more about the classic things like memorization of things and depending on the teacher you can either learn a lot or learn absolutely nothing

and learn to just memorize things that are of no interest to you just so you can do *this* and get *this degree* and so on and so forth and they do not help you to live in the social media world, especially in high school.

He later added that like Hermione and Veronica, he likes the idea of school but does not like the “corrupt system of learning” or the “standardization of courses.”

Social Media as More Influential Than School

All five of the participants who were still in high school unanimously felt that social media was more influential in their life than school. Hermione explained that she will just “float” over to social media throughout her day because she likes “social things and being around people.” She associates being in the classroom with being by herself, and she does not like “to sit around in class by myself.” Instead she likes to “be interactive with people and learn new things and learn about people” which social media allows, which is why it is easier when she is at home to go on social media than it is to start a project like an essay. She believes “it is more influential in my life, having social media, just because I’m always on it rather than I’m not always thinking about school and what happened in school.”

Blair shared similar ideas as social media “has so many things trending and becoming popular at all times” which influences her life more often than school.

Phoenix had a more radical view and mirrored Gerald’s critique of the school system, sharing

I’ve learned to think for myself through social media and not in school. In school I’ve learned to follow the textbook and to memorize and learned to do

what I'm told—that's all I've learned in school. But social media has gotten me to think for myself.

As mentioned, Phoenix follows a lot of social justice Instagram accounts and web pages, and these have gotten her to “question stuff, and question authority, and think for myself” which is why she is so critical of school.

Phoenix's critique of school is very similar to Gerald's as he also dislikes that school focuses on memorization instead of practical application. Veronica also shared that social media is a bigger influence on her because “school just teaches you to memorize certain things” that you might not care about, but social media allows you to learn more about things you are really interested in.

Gerald said that “everything connects with social media but not everything connects with high school and literally your high school is within your social media. I can say social media [is a bigger influence] with confidence just because it's legitimately everything going on.” Gerald uses social media for everything from working on projects with others, to getting homework help from his peers; he even has Facebook groups for his classes so that he and his peers can stay up to date on the course schedule and content. He feels that everything that he does in life can fit into social media including school, in a way that all of these different things cannot fit into school.

Michael was the only participant who said that school is a bigger influence on him than social media. Michael felt that if he was 1 or 2 years younger (i.e., Hermione and Gerald's age) that he would feel the same way that they do about social media, but he feels he was on the “cusp” of total social media saturation in his school

experience. He said that “if I was a year or two younger and still in high school I think social media would definitely be a bigger influence—bigger than school” but he was born in 1995 as opposed to the participants who were born during or after 1997. He only started to actively use Instagram and Twitter in the last 2 years of his high school experience (2012-2014) and now that he has been out of high school for 6 months, he can see the influence that school had on his life. He said that he saw people every day at school whom he has not kept in touch with since leaving and this emancipation has really shaped the way that he reflects on school. He also said that being out of the routine of waking up at 7:00 a.m. has allowed him to further see the impact that school had on his life. That being said, his participation on social media for the past 2 years has really changed his life. As discussed, Michael feels that social media has helped him to create his personality and reach out to people in a way he has never been able to.

Influence of Personal Technologies on Perceptions of School

Five participants unanimously felt that personal technologies have influenced the way that they think and feel about school. Hermione feels that personal technologies have influenced her perceptions of schooling as she “can learn the exact same things they teach me at home at my fingertips” and if she was given a topic she “could research it no problem” because she likes to learn independently and research things on her own. On her laptop or cell phone she can access worlds of information “and be done within an hour instead of sitting and listening to a note [*sic*] and not even covering everything of it.” In fact, she shared stories of being in class and using her phone or laptop to search for answers on the Internet when her teachers get stuck.

She likes researching things for her teacher on her phone because it motivates her more to find the answer and gives her learning more of a purpose.

Veronica feels that current technological practices have influenced her perceptions of schooling because they have heightened a detached feeling that she feels from the curriculum. She is frustrated with the curriculum and with her teachers because “there’s been no technology to actual technology that’s like crazy now, and they need to be teaching us things that relate to our future, not past.” Veronica wants teachers to use current technology and teach practical applications of technology in her classes; especially her Com/Tech elective that she feels is very archaic.

Gerald shared that personal technologies have shaped the way that he views school because “it brings other people’s ideas of school to my eyes and it allows me to elaborate on other people’s opinions.” He has learned a lot about school from reading the opinions of others, and has learned more about what happens in school on a day to day basis from what his friends share using personal technologies and social media.

While Blair felt more influenced by social media than school, she was the only one who did not feel that personal technologies influenced the way she felt about school. She said that “technology doesn’t influence my opinion on school, I think school influences my opinion of it.” Blair stated several times that social media does not influence her, and this answer was an extension of that idea.

All participants shared that their peers post about social media, and that it is not always favourable. Blair describes going on her Twitter and every day seeing at least 10 posts that comment on school or are about school, and Michael agrees and

said “on average you’d see 10 to 20 tweets a day” about school. Veronica shared that it was exam time and that everyone was posting about his or her exams on Twitter and Facebook. Gerald recalls reading a post on Facebook yesterday that said “Mr. so and so just said the F word in class” and added that because students are there for 6 hours each day they are continuously posting about school. Hermione goes to a school where there a stricter dress code has just been enforced, and she said that lately people have been posting about that with their own unique hashtag for the situation. Lastly, Phoenix gave a very detailed answer explaining three types of posts she always sees on social media: the kids who always complain about school, the girls who always post their outfits that they wear to school, and the students who need help about one of their classes or projects in school.

What Students Learn From Social Media

All participants shared that they have learned a lot about people from using social media. Relating back to the subtopic of truthful performances, all participants have learned more about who people really are through both the content they post and how they use the medium.

Gerald shared that he has learned “who to trust and who not to trust,” and “who to get involved with and who not to get involved with.” Hermione adds that she has learned “that you really can’t judge someone off of [social media]” because people can be very different in real life than they are online. She adds that “you have to actually learn [about] a person and not just rely on their Twitter account or their social media account because that’s not always how they are.” Veronica has learned that social media can be used in a positive and negative way, and that people have the

ability to say mean things to you online that they would never say to your face and that you cannot take it to heart.

In terms of learning about ideas and concepts, Gerald has learned that he has “the world at my fingertips” and he can look up most information, skills, recipes, and even instructions on social media through someone else’s link, suggestion, or personal experience. Hermione shared that she uses it for her art and that she follows a lot of art accounts that teach her quick video tutorials and inspire her. She also has learned that she wants to travel and see the world, and enjoys looking at Instagram accounts of other girls who are her age from around the world.

Blair said that social justice and activism are popular subjects on Tumblr, and she has learned a lot about topics like feminism and white privilege and she now considers herself “a social rights activist” from this knowledge. She also shared that she watched her peers get educated on issues of racism and police brutality during the Michael Brown trials through social media sites like Instagram and Facebook

Remember when the whole Mike Brown crisis happened? That was like blown up on social media and a lot of people were getting educated about like police brutality and stuff like that so I would say things like that are a very positive aspect of social media because they inform people on things.

On a similar note, Phoenix has also learned a lot about social justice outreach and even veganism through social media. She follows feminist blogs and Instagram accounts, and has even learned about safe stick n’ poke tattoo techniques that she has used. Michael also follows feminist Twitter accounts and expressed his concern for the newly founded “Meninist twitters” that he sees popping up. He also shared that

social media has recently turned him onto Vice documentaries, which he feels have taught him a lot about the world.

Participants' Instagram Statistics

In addition to the interviews, data were collected from the participants' Instagram accounts in February 2015. All data collected reflect how these accounts appeared during that month and year.

Hermione's Instagram Account

As of February 2015 Hermione had 98 posts on her Instagram account. I examined Hermione's Instagram account after our interview in December 2014 and recorded in my personal researcher's journal that she had 85 photos. After learning that she deletes photos, I examined her account in January 2015 and recorded that she had 92 photos posted. As discussed, Hermione continually deletes photos so as to not have more than 100 photos posted on her account at a time. Hermione has 418 followers and is only following 207 users. She has chosen not to write a biography of herself to display on her page and instead her only biography is of her real first and last name.

Of her current 98 posts, 82 are of herself in some capacity either by herself or with friends. Ten of these photos are "selfies" (photos that she has taken of herself by herself) and the captions for such photos include "my bathroom lighting makes me look orange," "random fall selfie," and "this is how to selfie?" Photos that are of Hermione acquire around 40 to 60 likes (some photos of herself acquiring more than 60 likes) while other photos such as her art or photos of other people can range from a base of 12 to 40 likes. Her oldest post is from 82 weeks ago and has 24 likes.

In terms of posting about school, Hermione has 11 photos that are either about school, or were taken in the physical space of the school. For example she has a photo of herself holding a dead pig in her grade 11 Biology class captioned “Wilbur our lil piglet,” and also has a photo of herself with a girlfriend wearing oversized t-shirt smocks entitled “no pants in art with Kelsey*.” One of her first posts on her page is about school and the photo includes a coffee that is captioned “Why do math when you could get a Tims?”

Blair’s Instagram Account

Blair has 34 pictures posted to her Instagram, has 131 followers, and is following 190 other users. Her short biography states that “all I care about is mashed potatoes and like four people” and also provides a link to her personal and public Tumblr page. Anyone can access her personal Tumblr page, and as she described in the interview, her Tumblr is filled with a lot of feminist images and information including a recent article about two male penguins in Norway who have just become parents.

Of her 34 posts, eight are of her in some capacity either alone or with friends, and none were taken in the physical space of the school. Nine of the pictures are of art that is either her own or various public street art. Photos of herself acquire anywhere from 25 to 60 likes, while the last photo of herself that she posted received 27 likes. Photos of her art and food range much lower in likes and only collect about 11 to 20.

Blair does not appear to post as frequently as the other participants, but still actively uses Instagram to look at photos and continually like her friends’ posts. She said in the interview that she likes to ensure that all of the photos on her Instagram are

“laid out and I make sure that everything is in the right like cropping and everything” adding that her page is “like an art, it has to be laid out perfectly.” However the editing, cropping, and adding of borders to photos that she posts is a recent practice and only started 32 weeks ago. Photos posted before that time do not have a border and have not been edited/cropped.

Phoenix’s Instagram Account

Phoenix has 439 posts to her Instagram account with 424 followers and 1,177 users whom she is following. After our interview in December, I reviewed her Instagram account and in my personal researcher’s journal I recorded that she had 450 photos posted to her Instagram. Now, more time has passed and she has even fewer posts suggesting that like Hermione, Phoenix will go back and delete photos. Of her current 439 posts, 155 are of her in some capacity either alone or with friends and 46 of those are of just her. Her biography reads that “wisdom isn’t measured by age, it’s measured by experience” and she’s written “tattoos, vegan, music and moshing, positive vibes, caffeinated” and “I’ll sleep when I’m dead” as part of her interests.

Twenty-eight of Phoenix’s 439 posts were of school in some way. Phoenix disclosed in the interview that she does not attend the majority of her grade 10 classes because she works overnight at her local job and she is tired during the day. She is not supported by her parents and was recently moved into a foster home that is not working out well for her. While the majority of posts about school are from her grade 8 and grade 9 years, she recently posted a photo of a vegan Pad Thai dish in a styrofoam container captioned “back in school, and good changes are happening for both Megan* and myself so celebratory Pad Thai delivered to work was called for.” A

friend commented “Back in school? So proud” with three heart symbols, while another commented “Wooooo Go *Phoenix!” This photo received 35 likes on Instagram.

Phoenix’s first Instagram photo was of herself on a grade 8 field trip captioned “lol history trip” from 99 weeks ago. She also has a photo from 91 weeks ago with two boys sitting at a computer that reads, “we have intense study sessions.” Phoenix also posted a handful of photos from her grade 8 graduation. Seventy-seven weeks ago she posted a photo of herself and two friends wearing science goggles in a classroom captioned “the last picture we took before my cell phone got taken away #science.” Additionally, around 60 weeks ago she posted two photos that were taken in a classroom of her and a friend, and then three mirror pictures taken in a school bathroom are scattered throughout the bottom of her page.

It is interesting to see her performances through photos change as the focus of her Instagram (as she confirmed) is now on photos of bands, tattoos, (vegan) junk food, and partying. Phoenix has 20 posts that involve either drinking alcohol, smoking a cigarette, or smoking marijuana. The first photo of this type was posted 36 weeks ago showing two rolled marijuana joints and it received 23 likes. Additionally, since that photo she has seven posts where she has been served alcohol underage and/or is in a nightclub or bar. Phoenix’s like count ranges from 20 to 50 and is consistently above the 20 like mark. In the interview she shared that one of her photos once got 90 likes, and this was a photo on her Facebook page.

Veronica’s Instagram Account

Veronica has 176 posts with 458 followers and a following count of 215. Her

biography states that “Instagram is gay, Lights is my wife, her baby is my baby” and that “Kyle* is a faggot.” To give some context to her statements, Lights is a popular recording artist who recently had a baby, and Kyle* is Veronica’s boyfriend.

One-hundred and six of Veronica’s 176 photos are of Veronica in some capacity and 63 of those photos are of just her. She has also posted three short videos of herself singing and playing guitar. Like her biography, Veronica captions many of these photos with words like “fag,” “faggot,” and “gay.” A selfie from 2 weeks ago is captioned “I’m a fag and I like to wear Jessica’s* sweater,” then a nice photo of her and Jessica* is captioned “We’re gay.” Furthermore, a selfie that she took 44 weeks ago is captioned “school’s gay” to which a friend wrote “you’re gay” and Veronica replied “shut up faggot.” In fact, 19 of her 176 posts are captioned with the words “gay,” “fag,” or “faggot.”

In the interview Veronica shared that she used to care a lot about her Instagram participation and would use many hashtags in order to connect more people to her profile to get likes; comparatively, now she only uses about three or four hashtags on her photos and said that she does not care as much about social media. While she has deleted most of the older posts with many hashtags from her account, there are a few that still exist at the very bottom of her profile. For example, one photo from 99 weeks ago has 29 hashtags of what are considered the most popular and trending hashtags on Instagram, including “#tagsforlikes,” “#love,” and “#tweegram.” Although this photo is a black and white photo of her and a girlfriend, she has also used the hashtags of “#sun,” “#food,” “#sky,” and “#summer” even though these things are not included in the picture. Veronica has many photos of

herself that get anywhere from 15 likes to 30 likes, with her highest liked photo being a selfie that received 33 likes. In her interview she shared that her highest liked photo of all time is 300 likes, and that was a Facebook display photo.

Veronica has eight posts that relate to school, including a selfie captioned “in class selfies,” and a photo of herself with a girlfriend playing guitar at school that reads “guitar class tho.” She also has a video of her friends playing with plastic gloves entitled “science class got a little side tracked with the gloves” to which there is another video immediately after that depicts eight or nine different shapes being made with the gloves that reads “yo killin it, swag squad, broken gloves, broken hearts.” She also has another selfie taken in class (which makes a total of three) that reads “school sux.”

Gerald’s Instagram Account

Gerald has 399 posts with 647 followers and a following count of 200. His biography states “picturessss yay” and is followed by a guitar, microphone, camera, game controller, cigarette, beer, and noodle soup emojis. Of his posts, 203 are of him in some capacity, while 53 are of himself appearing alone in the photo. Additionally, 22 of the 203 photos of Gerald are selfies in which he is holding the camera to take a photo of himself, or himself with a friend.

In terms of posts that relate to school, Gerald has 26 posts that are either taken at school or are related to school in some way. His first post about school is from 120 weeks ago and is a picture of a girl doing work in class that is captioned “she’s actually working in MSIP!” The next photo shows him, the same girl, and another girl in class entitled “Harry, Ron, and Hermione #HarryPotter #swag.” Another photo of

school shows Gerald hugging a skeleton in what appears to be a science classroom entitled “We’re just friends okay... #love #bio #class” which received 59 likes on Instagram. Another photo shows Gerald and four of his friends sitting on the school hallway’s floor. Three of those four friends appear to be male and have their hair tied up in a bun while the caption reads “my friends with the manly buns” and has 70 likes.

Gerald’s photos receive many likes, and the last photo he posted of himself 5 days ago has received 107 likes. In fact, a friend commented on the like count of the photo by writing “SO CLOSE TO 100 LIKES” and then commenting right after “HA I UNLIKED NOW ONLY 98.” Another friend commented “100th like, I got you homie” and right after that Gerald replied “Bro fist bump” with a knuckle emoji to the friend that liked the photo. Going all the way back to Gerald’s first posts it appears that his like counts were not initially this high; in fact many photos from over 100 weeks ago only have one or two likes on them. Further, while examining his performances through photos, the content of his posts has changed and evolved from his initial posts. He began his Instagram account by posting low quality pictures of things that might not be considered by some to be that important (e.g., one of his first posts was of a sombrero) but over the course of his 399 posts he has transitioned to posting nicely edited and artistic photos. In addition to the photo quality changing, the focus of his posts have changed too as there is an emphasis on photos that involve music and guitars, going to concerts, or being with and/or partying with groups of people.

Michael’s Instagram Account

Lastly, Michael’s Instagram account has 211 posts with 274 followers and a

following count of 247. Like Blair, Michael links to his Tumblr account in his biography, and the other piece of information included is the name of his hometown. Michael's first post is from 34 weeks ago, which suggests that he too deletes photos that are older, like Hermione and Phoenix have done. Due to the fact that there are no photos posted prior to 34 weeks ago, there are no posts that have been taken while in the physical sphere of the school. Michael has 32 photos of himself with 25 of those photos being selfies. However, Michael has not posted a selfie in 10 weeks, which is around the time that he started to post his photography to Instagram. Instead of posting solely photos of food, of him, and of his records, he began posting artistic photos of nature and artistic edits of bands, which has changed the look of his Instagram account. In fact, he now receives anywhere from 20 to 40 likes on average, when comparatively his older Instagram posts only have a few likes (and list the names instead of a number). As said in his interview, Michael does not feel that his Instagram could accurately represent him because he is a very silly person but now focuses on posting his serious photography.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter begins with a summary of the research before moving into a discussion of the findings. The discussion addresses three major themes found within the data and provides answers to the research questions before outlining this research's implications for 21st century pedagogical practice. The implications that this study has for future research are then explored and this chapter concludes with a final reflection from the researcher.

Summary

This research examined social media use and the new socialization experience of the 21st century learner. As students' virtual identities have become an omnipresent force in their socialization experience, this research attempted to investigate the influence that virtual identities have on the learner to uncover how they manifest within 21st century socialization at school. This research also aimed to uncover if virtual identities and personal technology use are then influencing students' perceptions of their schooling experience.

In order to address this research problem, the following questions were asked:

1. How do performances of virtual identity influence the ways in which students communicate, relate to, and understand each other both in and out of the classroom?
2. What are student attitudes toward virtual social capital, and does this affect peer relationships?
3. How have digital mediums and virtual identities influenced students' perceptions of schooling in the 21st century?

To uncover the learners' true lived experience using social media, a qualitative research strategy was used in which interviews were conducted with participants using a semi-structured interview format. Qualitative inquiry allowed for an in-depth investigation of virtual identity phenomena. Six participants were recruited using purposive sampling, and six individual semi-structured interviews took place for this research. The participants' Instagram accounts were also viewed and data were collected from these accounts in the form of pictures, captions, hashtags, follower counts, following counts, and comments. A reflexive researcher's journal was also used as a form of data for this project. Data were analyzed using axial coding and constant comparative methods.

Discussion

Before discussing this research's three major themes, this section frames those themes and situates both the researcher and data using a theoretical framework provided by Marshall McLuhan. After McLuhan's influence on the data analysis is addressed, the first section of this discussion offers an analysis of the impact that virtual identities have on student life, and concludes with an answer to the first research question. The second section discusses the significance of virtual social capital while working toward an answer to the second research question. Lastly, students' perceptions of school are addressed and this too concludes with an answer to the final research question.

McLuhan as the Medium for the Discussion

Marshall McLuhan's (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* boldly declared that the medium is the message, and chapter 1 unpacked the

significance of this prolific statement. As a follow up to this work he wrote *The Medium is the Message* with Quentin Fiore in 1967, and their predictions for media's role in future society are felt now more than ever. Understanding that the medium as the message, or the "message," is to understand that the use of the medium is of greater consequence than the medium's content. The medium as the message frames the discussion, as each section will focus on how the medium of social media affects the participants rather than investigating and interrogating all of the content on Instagram itself. While this project collected data from the participants' Instagram accounts, the data from these accounts will not be the focus of the discussion and will instead be supplemental to the effects that Instagram itself has on participants. The discussion will use McLuhan's analysis and predictions on the evolution of media and mediums as an anchor to investigate the consequences that Instagram participation has on the participants' corporeal condition.

Virtual Identities and Student Life

This section addresses virtual identity's influence on student life and is organized around several themes that include a close examination of students' feelings on navigating the realms of the virtual and corporeal, the self-reflexivity of their own performances, an analysis of participants' perceptions of gender-based performances, and their interpretations of pictures' role in 21st century socialization. After discussing these themes a conclusion to the first research question is presented.

Navigating the realms of the virtual and the corporeal. All participants spoke of the obstacles they have encountered when navigating their virtual and corporeal identities. All participants unanimously shared how they both "hated" and

“loved” social media and consequently saw it as both a negative and positive concept for many reasons, including others’ performances. Participants continuously struggle with their feelings toward social media and are able to point out social media’s inherent flaws (i.e., social media’s projection of continuous user participation as the norm for users) despite being situated within the social media matrix. Participants are not passive users who remain unaware of flaws that exist within the structures of SNSs, and it should be noted that participants shared that their teachers do not use social media in the classroom. Participants also disclosed that their teachers have not engaged them in conversations about SNS use or discussed SNS use in any way in the classroom. Teachers have not given students the tools to successfully navigate and make meaning of the social media terrain and everything they know and feel about social media is the result of independent exploration, risk-taking, and learning. From this, I surmise that participants are not passively consuming social media and they are actively investigating their relationship with social media and SNS use; their investigation has been unaided by the school or hidden curriculum.

When asked how they felt about social media, participants provided detailed and complex manifestos on how social media causes conflict in others’ lives and shared their frustrations with their peers’ dishonest performances. All participants explained that they have learned a lot about trust through social media, and they get frustrated when they see people act online in a way that is different from how they act in real life.

As participants negotiate the meaning of SNS profiles in the virtual realm, they reconcile virtual identities with real life. If they want to know something about a

peer (e.g., the peer's interests and even their social status), then they will look at the peer's social media account as a primary source of information. Even though participants are aware of social media's faults and at some points in the interview expressed cautiousness when accepting the SNS profile as truth, they all expressed a reliance on a person's social media presence to ascertain an idea about who they are (and of course, their social status). This appears to be a contradiction and is perhaps a double standard that is inherent with social media use; participants will judge a person by looking at their social media accounts despite their awareness that they are not always seeing a truthful representation online. They arbitrarily suspend their consciousness that profiles can be dishonest to examine accounts and make judgments of strangers.

Participants look at their peers' profile to check what I now refer to as the "content" and "frame" of the peer's social media accounts. Content refers to the type of posts the users make to their social media account including their pictures, statuses, captions, and hashtags, while the frame refers to the status of the built-in operations on a user's page such as the like count, comments, follower count, following count, and number of posts; the operations in the frame are quantifiable numbers that are displayed for everyone to see.

Erving Goffman (1959) believes that performativity exists in the actions of the individual, and now performativity in the 21st century also exists within social media through the content and frame of a profile. Goffman writes that the "front" is the overall image that a person puts forth, and that their front is divided into subsections, one of which consists of the "personal front" (p. 13). The personal front is comprised

of sign vehicles such as the person's clothes, size, body gestures, posture, speech patterns, et cetera and now in the 21st century I argue that social networking profiles are an extension of an actor's personal front. Goffman explains that society will always rely on the signs and signifiers of the physical (and now virtual) personal fronts, and judging the personal fronts of others is certainly not new. However, as social media profiles are always an accessible personal front, perhaps 21st century students are interpreting the personal fronts of others more frequently.

Personal identity performances. In addition to navigating their interactions with others, participants displayed a high level of self-reflexivity when discussing how they present themselves online. They are aware of how others perceive their online presence, and all participants offered a concise analysis of how they try to present themselves through their own social media participation. Again, their reflections and descriptions show that they are not passive consumers of social media and are strategic about their participation. Throughout the course of the interviews it became clear that social media users continually manipulate their virtual environment through such factors as the addition and deletion of content, and this continuous state of editing adds to the self-reflexivity of their online performances. All participants delete photos when photos do not receive a satisfactory amount of likes, decide on what types of photos and content to post, and also determine how to present themselves in their photos to their followers.

These virtual spaces have given participants the tools to consciously construct their identity with their intended audience in mind, and Michael summarized this nicely when stating that he has finally “created my own personality.” As Michael

feels he has undergone a transformation in his life that he owes to his social media presence, it could be argued that creating and maintaining a social networking profile is a very empowering experience for students. Rosenberg (1979) defines self-concept as “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object” (p. 7), and students such as Michael have self-concepts (feelings and thoughts in reference to themselves) that are positively influenced by social media. Social media provides students with new spaces to carefully construct and perform their identity and this could have positive implications for how they see themselves (e.g., a new or renewed sense of confidence). Confidence in their newly constructed identity could also help students acquire social capital when interacting with others in a way that their previous performances would not. Michael stated that he had met people in his community through social media, proving that the creation of his identity has attracted both virtual and non-virtual social capital. Furthermore, as students like Michael are continually making choices as to how they perform their identities and clearly articulate the different performances they have across the mediums, it could be argued that social media performances help students with self-reflection.

Perceptions of online gender-based performances. Participants’ interviews also conveyed subtle but strong opinions on gender-based performances through SNSs. The participants’ opinions on gender influence the ways in which they relate to each other both in and out of the classroom as perceptions of gender-based performativity could shape all interactions between the different genders in the high school sphere. Within the four female responses, Hermione and Veronica spoke of

how other teenage girls post photos of themselves that can be perceived as sexual in nature, and both girls took issue with this. They both felt that females should not be taking photos where they appear that way, and they believe that seeing the performativity of other girls is a negative to social media use. Hermione and Veronica displayed attitudes of internalized misogyny as they chastised females for these performances, and both felt these pictures are only taken to get attention from the opposite sex. Despite vehement opposition to females posting this way, Veronica does not condemn males for their reactions to the photos through the implication that it is somehow in their nature or natural for them to react in the ways she described. Veronica also feels that males do not have as much conflict as girls do online because they are not the “arguing type,” again providing excuses that ultimately favor the male gender.

Veronica and Hermione’s attitudes on female participation on SNSs differed from Phoenix and Blair’s. Phoenix and Blair’s opinions on performances appeared to come from a place of concern and worry for their female peers. Phoenix specifically discussed how images from Instagram and media make girls feel bad about their bodies and Blair said that unrealistic societal expectations of how girls are supposed to act and look like are present online. While all four girls agreed that females perform their gender in a more provocative way through photos, the comments came from two very different perspectives. Phoenix and Blair both identify as feminists and they shared that they follow a lot of feminist and body positive web pages and Tumblr accounts; these feminist social media accounts could have shaped their perceptions on gendered performances. Phoenix and Blair did not demonize other

girls for the types of photos they post and rather blamed society for placing the pressure on girls to feel like they have to perform in this way. They spoke directly to elements of patriarchy in their explanations of gender differences, and it could be argued that their feminist views essentially shaped their interview.

Michael shared similar feminist ideals in a story where he “called out” a girl who was bashing other girls’ photo performances on Twitter. When the female tweeted that girls should not post provocative photos, Michael was quick to reply that girls can do what they want and it does not matter what anyone else thinks. Michael shared that he follows feminist Twitters, and this could have influenced how he perceived and responded to the comment. He was asked in the interview if he thought that there was more pressure on girls to perform online, and he said that he believed so, but that he did not know why. Michael did not have the same terminology that Phoenix and Blair have to articulate “patriarchy” and “autonomy,” but those ideas were certainly present throughout his answers.

How pictures shape 21st century identity. The most extreme opinion on the value of pictures came from Hermione who said that a photo of two or more people socializing is more important than the act of socializing itself. While the other participants did not give answers that were as radical, there are times where participants engage in actions in the physical realm for the sole purpose of taking a photo to post in the virtual realm; the choices they make when they engage in these behaviours are worth investigating.

Pictures and the habitus. Bourdieu (1964) created the term habitus to define the collection of qualities that are central to a person and that shape a person’s life,

and social media appears to have a profound influence on the user's habitus. The habitus is created by and representative of a person's morals, life and lifestyle habits, attitudes, socialization, and everyday activity (Bourdieu, 1964; Jenkins, 1992). Habitus is originally a Latin word that "refers to a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 44), but Bourdieu uses this word to imply that one's habitus transforms all external influences "into a disposition that generates meaningful practices" not limited to bodily capabilities (Bourdieu, 1964, p. 166). Instead, one's disposition exists in relation to "systems of generative schemes" that shape and become each individual's functions (Bourdieu, 1964, p. 166). An actor's entire lifestyle is a product of the habitus because lifestyles are perceived "through the schemes of the habitus" which are influenced by such external factors as life experience, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, et cetera (Bourdieu, 1964, p. 168).

The habitus is inextricably embedded in the participants' answers on the influence of photographs in their life. All participants feel that there is an expectation placed on social media users to frequently post interesting photos, and Gerald supported this through describing feelings of anxiety and restlessness if he has not posted to his Instagram account in 3 days. As the participants value social media, they value photographs and engage with picture taking in their everyday life to satisfy their own perceived expectations of social media use. Taking photos affects the habitus as it shapes the ideology of the individual who then feels motivated to share the photos taken through social media (Bourdieu, 1964). Picture taking also influences the habitus through creating physical routines comprised of the sheer act of taking a

photo, and participants engage in this up to 30 times a day and sometimes more (Bourdieu, 1964). Michel de Certeau (1984) calls this the “everyday practices” of one’s life and explains that these practices are made up of an “ensemble of procedures” that are shaped by ideology and learned behaviour (p. 43). Thus through their practice of everyday life participants stop their activity to take pictures and make choices as to what to share, how they will share it, and who they will share it with. Taking photos affects how they operate in their daily life and is part of their daily procedures, and their need to take photos is simultaneously influenced by their habitus while existing as behaviour that is part of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1964).

Pictures and anticipated memory. Chapter 1 described how the upcoming generation now experiences moments in life with what professor Daniel Kahneman (2010) calls anticipated memory; instead of living in the moment they anticipate how they will want the moment to feel like when later reflected on and shared with others. There seemed to be a strong correlation between anticipated memory and the participants’ feelings and thoughts on moments that they set up and then destroy. The moment they have captured within the photo is a fleeting, ephemeral moment in real time but when it is captured it is immortalized and shared under the pretense of being a long-lasting experience for the user. When Phoenix or Veronica set up their food, take the photo, and then wreck the moment they have created, the nice photo is shared and framed as if it represented their entire experience. As participants set up the photo they experience the moment with an anticipated memory, as what the photo captures does not represent the true lived experience (Kahneman, 2010).

Phoenix, Michael, and Gerald used identical examples of going to concerts

and having to decide whether to actively participate in the crowd or stand back to document the band so they may share the experience with others. When they stand back to film they could be removed from what they are trying to convey as they are using their devices to record and therefore to experience the moment. Thus they will share their media with an anticipated memory of what the feeling and atmosphere was at the concert and not what they experienced in the exact moment of documentation (Kahneman, 2010).

Anticipated memory could play a role in Hermione's belief that the photo is more valuable than the action as the photo can reach more people and convey a desired message to the onlooker. Hermione and Michael agreed that peers who post photos in which they are with a lot of people are perceived as more popular, even though in that moment the peers are not actually socializing. The photo of two or more people posing together can tell a story and convey a desirable message when shared, even if the people were only together for the photo and then went their separate ways. Thus the photo is important to a user's virtual identity because it can be shared on social media, manipulated, and framed in a certain way to project a favorable image for the user. Anticipated memory allows the social media user to convey the desired emotions and feelings from a moment, even if they were not truthfully experienced that way.

How do performances of virtual identity influence the ways in which students communicate, relate to, and understand each other both in and out of the classroom? Socialization in the 21st century places great importance on virtual identities as students are continually connected to each other, continually sharing and

communicating with each other, and continually relying on social media profiles as part of their impression management of others. All participants spoke to Reichelt's (2007) ambient intimacy as they use social media to stay in touch with friends and family and also use social media to meet new people and become informed about their peers' lives. In the same way that McLuhan (1964) explained that mediums are an extension of one's self, virtual identities are extensions of students' selves and this section explained how using social media influences students' socialization by examining how participants navigate the corporeal and virtual realms, how they perform their virtual identities, the role that gender plays in performing and perceiving performances online, and lastly the role that pictures play in shaping identity the 21st century.

In the 1960s McLuhan wrote that electric technologies were teaching people more about each other than ever, and his words are both appropriate and true for 21st century social media. Data from this study show that students know a lot about each other, and that the social media profile adds another layer to the multidimensional socialization experience that school provides. While the mediums of socialization have changed, the same themes discussed in the above sections of popularity and fitting in, discovering who to trust and who not to trust, seeking independence, and of living up to perceived expectations of peers (i.e., taking photos) have always been present in the schooling experience. Social media has given a new platform for these issues to exist and become public, but it has certainly not created these issues and it is reasonable to conceive that these issues are typically representative of the schooling experience.

Participants did speak about the negative implications of SNS use in relation to virtual identity, and these negatives need to be addressed. An inherent obstacle in social media use is that when students now run into social problems or get involved in conflict that originates from an online source, they are unceasingly connected to that problem through their personal technologies. The uninterrupted connection to each other plays a large role in participants' lives, and during the interview the participants shared that there is a lot of conflict on social media; however, it is conceivable that a lot of conflict happens in teenage socialization regardless of social media use, and the issues that have always existed have now spilled over on the digital medium. Another negative aspect to social media that concerns participants is that their peers feel empowered to say whatever they want regardless of the consequences, which does lead to cyberbullying and again conflict on these mediums. Instead of words being exchanged in private, these words are now exchanged in the public sphere and are posted for others to read and even get involved with through commenting. If social media users run into conflict online then they have to determine what opinions they will leave private and what they will make public, which is something that the participants struggle with.

The participants have independently interpreted the social media terrain without assistance from their educators and are intuitively making choices about self-presentation and social media participation while discovering the consequences of each choice for themselves. None of the participants' high school teachers have talked to them or given them guidance about their online interactions in recent years; however Blair, Veronica, and even Michael shared that they attended one

cyberbullying presentation when they were in grade 7 or grade 8 that they did not find useful or take seriously. Even if there are school policies in place that prohibit using social media in the classroom, students should have the opportunity to learn about responsible social media use and be given the tools to think critically about their virtual interactions.

While participants do not use social media in the classroom, a new layer to their socialization that happens in the classroom involves their familiarity with their peers' social media use. Veronica and Blair both shared stories where they actually followed their peers online first and then met them in the classroom second. Additionally, if Gerald does not know a peer in his class then he will instinctively check their social media account, and Phoenix claims that she will know everything about her peers based on what they share to social media; all participants felt that social media had influenced their opinion of their classroom peers. Further, all participants use social media to communicate with peers and work on projects or catch up on missed projects and assignments, which also influences how they relate to each other at school. Gerald summarized this well when explaining, "literally your high school is within your social media" referring to the scope and depth of social media's content and interactions. Virtual identity changes the ways that students understand each other in and out of the classroom as students rely on social media to get information about their peers, use social media to meet their peers in the school whom they do not know, and communicate with their classmates on missed projects or assignments.

Overall virtual identities make impressions on students and motivate students

to perform their identities online in advantageous ways (i.e., by projecting a positive or desirable image of themselves through their SNS profile). It could be said that the essence of a school's socialization experience is still fundamentally the same; virtual identities have not changed what it means to socialize at school, rather they have just expanded the stage whereby identity is performed. Moreover, these data show that participants have not been given the opportunity to learn about SNS use in school, despite SNSs being such an influential and serious part of their lives. Therefore these students should be given the opportunity to learn about social media use in school, and should be given the tools to think critically so that they can make the best choices on these mediums.

Virtual Social Capital

In this section I examine the pressures that are on social media users, interrogate the values that participants place on likes, and refine my definition for virtual social capital. The second research question that assesses virtual social capital's influence on peer relationships is answered following this discussion.

Pressure on social media users. The participants have many complex feelings on social media use and shared their honest beliefs on topics such as existing pressures that are on social media users. They disclosed that social media users feel pressure to perform in different ways, one of which is the pressure felt to continually post interesting content. The participants are motivated to maintain attention from other users, and this causes frequent posting to be considered an expectation from the participants' peers.

Like thresholds. The interviews revealed that each participant has a personal

“like threshold” which are the number of likes that their photos need to receive in order to become satisfactory. Their responses suggest that likes could be very important to all heavy social media users, that all heavy social media users could have these different thresholds/expectations of likes for their photos (as each participant did), and that heavy social media users could also be affected by how many likes their photos acquire.

Likes make the participants feel good, but it is uncertain if these are directly related to their self-esteem or if it is that the likes look good to the overall virtual social status and capital of the profile which then makes the user feel good. Participants’ social media participation is largely impacted by their like counts, and the more likes that photos acquire then the more virtual social status that the entire profile collects, which is very important to users.

Defining virtual social capital. I would like to define virtual social capital as the potential that a social media account has to network with other users to create meaningful connections in the virtual world. As users are connected to each other’s real information through social media, the most common forms of virtual social capital on SNSs manifest in likes, follower counts, and comments that are posted as these criteria serve as statistics for all users to see. This capital is exclusive to social media profiles as it only manifests in the connection to real users’ content and thus the documented interactions of capital that are made public on the profile (again with likes, followers, and comments). The participants revealed that virtual social capital has a symbiotic relationship with the virtual social status that one’s account attains, as other users give profiles status through liking or commenting on photos, and

following the profile. Virtual social capital influences virtual social status that again influences virtual social capital to repeat in a cyclical fashion. Users with a lot of virtual social capital have a high follower count, consistently receive a lot of likes and comments on every photo, and go out of their way to continually post engaging content for their user base; they have virtual social capital because of their connections to the real SNS profiles of others. It is desirable for users to be connected to many social media profiles from their own, as this also increases the virtual social status of these accounts through the high amount of likes and followers.

What are student attitudes toward virtual social capital, and does this affect peer relationships? All participants shared that they use social media to stay connected with each other, and Gerald, Michael, Blair, and Veronica have had experiences where they have met friends first through their SNS profiles before meeting in real life. Participants think positively about networking with others online and like to use social media to interact with all types of profiles from all over the world. Participants discussed how they valued online interactions and this naturally led into how they use social media to collect virtual social status, which then became the centerpiece for the majority of interviews. As students' popularity and self-presentation in the physical school sphere matters, it became overwhelmingly clear that popularity and self-presentation in the eyes of school peers in the virtual sphere is also important.

The above sections outline how all participants view virtual social capital as an important form of virtual social status that is desirable to an online profile. Participants think positively of virtual social capital and have certain rituals to their

participation to ensure they acquire virtual social capital and status.

Participants feel that there is pressure on social media users to continually post and keep others' interest to acquire more or maintain current virtual social capital in the form of likes and followers. All participants also have a like threshold that they use to assess the virtual social status that their photos and profiles acquire. Gaining virtual social status is important because, as made clear by Phoenix, it is “embarrassing” for users to only get a few likes on a photo and thus have a low status that can be seen by any one of their peers. Blair agreed by adding that a user would never want others to look at a profile and say “Ha! She only got 11 likes” which is why it is important to maintain a high virtual social status. Gerald even hypothesized that having a low virtual social capital could negatively influence how people treat you in real life, though his views contrasted with Blair who does not think that would actually happen. It is thus reasonable to conclude that social media users with active participation (like the participants) strive to attain a high virtual social capital and thus virtual social status through the content and frame of their profiles.

Virtual social status does indeed influence peer relationships as peers reach out to others to ask for a hand in acquiring likes, and also interact with the profiles of friends to boost their popularity as well. In some cases virtual social capital has directly affected peer relationships as students have met online first and in life or at school second. It is uncertain if virtual social capital would negatively affect students' social capital while at school (and based on the data I hypothesize that it would not), but it is certain that students demonstrate a strong self-awareness of their virtual social status. Each participant shared that virtual social capital results in attention

from other users and therefore virtual social status, and both concepts are reciprocal in participants' online social media use.

Overall it is not surprising that peer acceptance and students' desires to be popular came through in the answers, as these are longstanding themes often associated with emerging adolescence and school. It is logical that the social dynamics commonly found in the school sphere now play out online through social networking and through virtual social capital and status. As popularity often influences peer dynamics at school, virtual social capital and status could influence peer relationships online as the students use social media profiles to make judgments about others. Again, participants (and likely their peers) have not been taught how to critically think and analyze these types of interactions, and these ideas have resulted from their own explorative experiences.

Students' Perceptions of School in the 21st Century

This final theme in the data explores students' attitudes towards schooling based on the critiques of the education system that were given during the interviews. Personal technologies and their influences on students are discussed and an answer to the final research question concludes this section.

Student anxiety and critiques of the education system. Perhaps the most radical piece of information to come out of this study was that the student participants unanimously felt that school was not preparing them for the new realities of the digital world. As I recorded in my reflexive researcher journal, I was quite moved listening to the participants' sophisticated critiques of the schooling system and was quite impressed at their ability to articulate existing systemic issues. I did not have

their radical ideas when I was in high school, and it was not until I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in my first year of undergraduate studies did I start to be critical of the educational system itself. Gerald discussed his frustration with school's emphasis on memorization at length and referred to standardization in schools as a "corrupt system of learning." Phoenix shared that in school she has learned to "follow the textbook and memorize" and be compliant to authority, and Veronica also felt that school has only gotten her to memorize facts demonstrated through memorizing the diagram of a handheld camera in her Com/Tech class. Clearly all three participants are frustrated with the education system's reliance on memorization and repetition as a form of learning that does not provide a critical or meaningful educational experience. Blair, Hermione, and Michael also critiqued their schooling experience, but their frustrations spoke to their lack of engagement with the content as opposed to the entire system itself.

While these views only represent six students and cannot be generalized to the entire student population in Ontario, it is still important to note that there are learners such as the participants who feel this way about their education experience. If Ontario's curricula slogan is to genuinely "reach every student" as is printed on Ontario documents and initiatives, then the participants' responses reveal that we are not reaching every student and that should compel us as educators and as concerned citizens to take action.

How have digital mediums and virtual identities influenced students' perceptions of schooling in the 21st century? As Marshall McLuhan (1960) once said

Today in our cities, most learning occurs outside the classroom. The sheer quantity of information conveyed by press-mags-film-TV-radio far exceeds the quantity of information conveyed by school instruction & text. This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid & cracked the very walls of the classroom, so suddenly, we're confused, baffled. (p. 25)

All five of the participants who are currently enrolled in high school feel that social media influences them more than school, and they surprisingly related their answers to the content that social media provides as opposed to the networking aspects. As information is rapidly shared through personal technology and social media, students have an acute awareness of the world and all feel that school does not accurately represent the current events of the 21st century. The McLuhan quotation above suggests that media, social media, and digital technology have allowed users to become more connected to sources of information outside the classroom, and participants' answers express a desire to learn more about our interconnected world and present day affairs. Hermione was frustrated that there was an entire civil rights movement happening in the United States in the aftermath of the Michael Brown trial and her classes did not relate any content to these current events; she especially disliked that her history class focused on events from hundreds of years ago as she felt "there's history now and social issues now" that she could be learning about. Marshall McLuhan uses the word "struggle" in *The Medium is the Message* to explain how students reconcile the differences between the outside world and the classroom, and the participants' responses suggest bridging these two spheres to benefit the students (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 100). While an understanding of history

certainly allows for a better understanding of present-day issues, the connections of the past to the present do need to be made in a way that Hermione (and likely other students) do not experience.

Gerald, Phoenix, and Veronica are very critical of the school system and personal technologies could have played a role in this. Gerald directly mentioned how social media has shown him others' opinions of school and has allowed him to contribute to and expand on their ideas. Naturally the opinions that get posted about school could have influenced Gerald's assessment of school, and could potentially influence all social media users who regularly see, read, and interact with others' opinions of school online.

Knowledge and opinions are crowdsourced and shared online through SNSs, and there are also a lot of memes, videos, and articles that circulate which are critical of school and target schools as sites of memorization and complacency. Every unfavourable analysis of the school system that could ever exist is online and readily available for students to access and share via social media. But whether these participants came to these realizations about school on their own or whether they read the critiques somewhere else (such as on popular memes), the point is that these ideas resonate with them and speak volumes about students' ability to understand complex breakdowns of power hierarchies within various institutions. Gerald, Phoenix, and Veronica's responses recognize convoluted systemic issues and their opinions need not be taken lightly; participants attacked the entire system of education as opposed to focusing only on events specific to their school or topics specific to only their education.

Veronica, Phoenix, Gerald, Blair, and Hermione all feel that the content of what they learn in school is not modern nor relevant to their lives. While I am sure every high school student has felt frustrated with the content taught, the participants' requests for contemporary content are not shallow or unreasonable. Hermione's desire to learn about social justice issues and the implications that the Michael Brown trial has are compelling and legitimate. Further, the fact that Veronica is memorizing diagrams and learning about a handheld camcorder in her elective is a justifiable reason to be frustrated with content in school. Students are critical of the ways in which they are taught the content, as well as of the content itself. It would be helpful for the students if the content of what was taught in schools reflected the connected and shared world that the students live in, and this includes adding in contemporary issues and ensuring that teachers make relevant, real world connections.

In closing, digital mediums and virtual identities have influenced students' perceptions of schooling in many intricate ways. Students feel like schools are not preparing them to live in the digital and connected world, and hopefully the educational community will recognize this and try to make improvements based on the suggestions presented.

#Implicationsforpractice

This section discusses the implications that these findings have for 21st century pedagogical practice. Social media as a tool for social transformation will be explored, as will the need for students to be educated on the best practices for social media use and media literacies. This section will also explore the potential that social media has as an ideology that operates under Althusser's (1971) Ideological State

Apparatus theory to further explain the importance of teaching students to think critically about social media's influence. Lastly, the need for relevant content in schools and a discussion on new literacies concludes this section.

Social Media as a Transformative Tool for Change

“How shall the new environment be programmed now that we have become so involved with each other, now that all of us have become the unwitting workforce for social change?” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 12).

Social media's use as a platform for critical social justice issues is present throughout the participants' responses thus suggesting the power that social media has as a transformative tool for social change. Michael, Phoenix, and Blair first expressed this idea as all three shared that they follow feminist Instagrams, Tumblrs, and Twitter accounts; consequently their answers when discussing gendered performances had strong feminist leanings. The websites they follow have users and accounts that continually produce and repost new content, and many regard these online spaces as safer spaces for minority and oppressed groups—safer spaces referring to “no sexism, no racism, and no homophobia” (Mashurova, 2013, para. 7). Phoenix and Blair are feminists and blamed the patriarchal society that we live in for putting pressure on girls to perform through photos online, which contrasted with the other two girls in the study. Michael has stood up online for a woman's right to autonomous choices irrespective of men's opinions, and the idea that girls are autonomous and their bodies are not objects of patriarchy is a third wave feminist ideal (Rampton, 2014).

Social media's ability to highlight other social justice issues came through the responses as Blair shared that she watched her peers get educated on race relations

through posts on social media about the Michael Brown trail. Blair said that her peers learned a lot about white privilege through social media, and she felt that it is beneficial to use social media to share information about social causes. Phoenix uses her social media for outreach, and Michael shared that social media has also gotten him to watch social justice documentaries that he enjoys and shares with his peers. It is uncertain if Veronica and Gerald use social media to learn about social justice issues as they did not articulate such in their answers. Instead, they (like all participants) spoke to the overall capabilities of social media to share and crowdsource information and opinions, which is a power that educators should teach students to mobilize effectively.

While some participants use SNSs on their own accord for social justice purposes, McLuhan asks how society and educators can use these technologies to affect real social change. A simple idea in response to the data and to McLuhan is to suggest that teachers help their students learn how to use these mediums effectively for these purposes. This might include teaching students about social media's role in mobilizing the Arab Spring's civil disobediences, protests, and resistances, and how social media was a driving force behind the Occupy Wall Street movement. A recent article published by CTV news declared that "social justice found its voice on social media in 2014" (McQuigge, 2014, para. 1) and there were many articles published that recapped the year's trending hashtags including #yesallwomen, #whyIstayed, #blacklivesmatter, #Ferguson, and #Icantbreathe to name a few (Grindberg, 2014; Weedston, 2014); educators should take advantage of this powerful tool.

There are courses available for teachers on how to use social media as a tool for change in the classroom such as “TC110: Social Media for Social Change,” and this is offered by the educational technology company techchange.com. Teachers do not have to organize entire demonstrations in order to use social media for change in the classroom, but students should be provided with the opportunity to think critically and essentially be “literate” about how these issues trend and are shared online. For example, as a classroom activity students could create their own clear and succinct hashtags about social justice issues, and use them to blog about the issue and share the issue with others (Korn, 2014). In fact, there are entire blog sites such as “Commission for Social Justice Educators Blog” to which that suggestion and many more on using social media as tool for social change in the classroom can be found. By teaching exactly how these mediums can be used to mobilize and share information, teachers would be equipping students with powerful tools to transform society.

Educating Students on Virtual Identity

Themes that are common to any high school experience are given platforms in the virtual sphere, and participants’ responses suggest that they do need help navigating the two realms of the virtual and corporeal. As stated above, students have had to navigate these channels with little to no help from their educators and have not been given the tools to think critically about online performances or expectations. As teachers are also social media users who have these virtual experiences, it would be helpful for students if teachers were to start a dialogue about the best practices for these digital spaces. The participants essentially explained that social media has an

embedded set of expectations that some users take very seriously, and it is these implicit qualities of social media use that students need help deconstructing.

Digital and media literacy. If critical digital literacy and media literacy were present in most 21st century curriculum then perhaps students would feel better equipped to interpret and dissect the virtual worlds around them. The company Media Smarts: Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy promotes the intersectionality of both literacies and critical thinking is the core concept for both ideas; it defines digital literacy as "the personal, technological, and intellectual skills that are needed to live in a digital world" and defines media literacy as "critical engagement with mass media" (Media Smarts, 2015, paras. 2-3). Students should have the opportunity to dissect aspects of media in the classroom so that they will be prepared to do so on their own. If they were provided with this opportunity, students would be better equipped to think through such ideas as the role that social media plays in their life (i.e., why they engage in behaviour just to take a photo).

Teachers do not have to use social media in the classroom to teach digital and media literacy but rather understand that their students are continually connected to media and need the skills to critically think about the content. Many teachers are connected learners themselves and do recognize the importance of digital and media literacy, and it would be helpful if more teachers adapted this same outlook. In closing, teachers can better prepare students for the 21st century by helping their students develop the skills needed for a digital world (as promoted by digital literacy) while becoming critically engaged with the media they are connected to (as promoted by media literacy).

Social media as an Ideological State Apparatus. Gerald explained that “social media as a whole is a very weird maze of rights and wrongs and hates and likes and thumbs up and thumbs down,” and the participants shared similar sentiments. These data collected for the interview also show that social media acts as an ideology that has indoctrinated the participants and potentially all heavy social media users; recognizing social media as an ideology heightens the importance of getting students to think critically about these mediums. More specifically, how participants use social media manifests the major ideas behind Louis Althusser’s (1971) Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) theory.

I argue that based on the participants’ responses, social media should be considered an ideology based on Althusser’s criteria, and that it then functions as an ISA that the students need to learn to think critically of. Althusser (1971) writes that ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (p. 162) in that ideology occupies real space in the individual’s life even though it is immaterial. Social media is not necessarily a tangible thing, but the implicit codes of conduct expressed by the participants and also the existence of virtual social capital help make social media an ideology. Ideology has a material existence through the actions of the individual, which the participants repeatedly confirmed through their answers on how navigating social media affects their behaviour. The participants in this study are greatly impacted by their social media use; for example, through their engagement in actions just so they may take a photo of it to share with their friends, their concern for how many likes a photo will receive, and their eagerness to delete photos that do not reach their like threshold (to name a

few). Althusser also writes that ideology must “interpellate” or indoctrinate individuals into its belief system, which social media has accomplished through the active participation of its users and the importance social media plays in the socialization experience of the participants.

Louis Althusser (1971) describes religion, media, education, and politics as ideologies that can be considered ISAs as they control the public’s thoughts and actions through the interpellation of individuals into these belief systems. Ideologies become ISAs as there are certain ordered conditions of conduct within every ISA, and each ISA perpetuates a model subject through the expected behaviour for each participant (Althusser, 1971). For example, the Catholic Church is an ISA that posits the model subject of Catholic behaviour, which includes living according to the Catholic bible, going to church, being involved with the church, et cetera (Althusser, 1971). Although Catholicism is an ideology that is intangible, it is made real through the actions of its Catholic subjects, especially when they strive to emulate the model subject that this ideology posits (Althusser, 1971). Thus ISAs “function by ideology” to shape the reality of the interpellated individual, and social media fits this criteria as it functions by an ideology to influence its users in some capacity (Althusser, 1971, p. 145); the ideology of social media becomes real through the actions of its users.

While not every user engages with social media in the ways expressed by the participants (much like not every Catholic goes to church each Sunday), the fact is that the participants situate themselves as heavy social media users and all of their answers triangulate as to how social media impacts their behaviour. As discussed by the participants, the desired social media profile is one that abides by certain criteria

such as frequently posting in order to collect the most virtual social capital. Similar to the example of Catholicism, all ISAs have a model subject that the interpellated individuals strive to be like, and therefore the model subject of the social media ISA is the user that acquires a high virtual social capital and therefore virtual social status by acting in accordance with the expectations of other users (Althusser, 1971). Thus, the social media ISA is perpetuated and supported by the actions of the individuals, and even while the students are at school they are still operating within the social media ISA.

If students were provided with critical thinking skills such as those that come from digital and media literacy, then perhaps social media's influence over them would be different. Participants spoke to hating and loving social media and explained how they are influenced by the embedded expectations. Therefore, thinking critically about the social media ISA and model subject could make the preconceived expectations of social media use easier to manage.

The Need for Relevant Content in Schools

It is a matter of the greatest urgency that our educational institutions realize that we now have civil war among these environments created by media other than the printed word. The classroom is now in a vital struggle for survival with the immensely persuasive “outside” world created by new informational media. Education must shift from instruction, from imposing of stencils, to discovery—to probing and exploration. (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 100)

The participants in this study craved curriculum content that was more relevant to their lives and all felt that school is not fulfilling its role to prepare them to live in the

“outside” digital world. Each student offered his or her own critique of the school system and had suggestions to improve classroom practice by providing more relevant and up-to-date subject matter for students. I suggest that we as teachers listen to what the students have to say and act on it. As Hermione said, effective 21st century teaching is not using the newest or most complex tools available, rather it is about trying to engage your students with relevant ideas and subject matter; the tools are always changing therefore teachers need to understand the pedagogy behind using the tools to meet students on the level that they are at. This relates back to the digital literacy and media literacies that put life in the 21st century as the focus of classroom activity. Further, chapter 2 of this study outlined how teachers can adapt a critical digital pedagogy that embraces aspects of connectivism to recognize the networked lives of the 21st century student to engage them with relevant content and critical thinking. Again, many teachers are implementing aspects of digital literacy, connectivism, and critical digital pedagogy in their classes, and these suggestions are instead a call to action for those teachers who are on the fence about using these approaches and their effectiveness.

New mediums, old arguments. In writing the above section, I recognize that many scholars before me have argued that all curriculum in schools need a dramatic overhaul and that this is certainly not a new nor original idea. Note Mary Wollstonecraft’s argument for instruction to be adjusted as to not “engage itself in investigations that are remote from life,” which requested presence of real world material in the 18th century classroom (1792, p. 45). John Dewey (1926) later made the same argument as “the school must represent life—life as real and vital to the

child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground” (p. 542). These existing critiques that span centuries remain applicable as relevant content and real world connections are still not present in every classroom.

While I have made suggestions for teachers and classroom practice based on these data, there are larger issues at play than just pedagogy; the flawed system that relies on memorization and standardization is still alive and well in the 21st century and is still causing problems for its teachers and students alike. In the quotation that opened this section, Marshall McLuhan calls for student-centered education that allows students a chance for self-discovery in the classroom (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). In this same work he argues that the school environment mirrors that of a factory’s assembly line, and Paulo Freire (1970) calls students’ passive participation in the assembly line the “banking method” of education (p. 72). In the banking method, the teacher is the depositor of information and the minds of the youth are seen as the depositories for information to get passed into with no criticality of any material present (Freire, 1970). Freire wrote that educators must to teach to raise students’ “conscientizacao” (p. 74), which is their critical awareness of the world, and this should be the goal of every classroom. Now in the 21st century students’ critical consciousness should include a critical awareness of the media that they are continuously interacting with and all students should have the opportunity to learn about this.

Freire (1970) also explained that teachers generally choose the class content and that “the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” which he believes to be a fault in our system (p. 71). Freire suggests that teachers can work with students to

make the curriculum relevant to their lives, and this would help students engage with the material, help to dismantle the power hierarchy in the classroom, and help move away from the standardization of curriculum and content. Additionally, making the curriculum more relevant to students' lives would help ensure that real-world connections are continually present throughout the lesson. Teachers are the gatekeepers who can ensure that the outdated curriculum can come to life in an extraordinary and relevant way. I have met many teachers who do teach in a student-centered, connectivist way; however, these data show that not all teachers are engaging their students in these ways and we need to repeatedly talk about these issues in education until that happens.

New literacies. Participants are continually texting, tweeting, updating their status, sharing and reading articles, and of course taking and posting photos, all of which demonstrates that they are literate in many ways. In fact, the importance of using proper grammar and conveying yourself in a concise way came up in many of the interviews. Michael's astute "think before you tweet" phrase is a lesson he has learned from SNS use, and he said that if you use improper grammar on any SNS your peers will point it out and embarrass you. Gerald shared the same idea, as he is cautious of his spelling because "you make one mistake on social media and the minute someone pokes fun at you you're like 'never making that mistake again!'"

It seems that students are continuously writing and sharing their stories in these virtual spaces, and these spaces are not like the isolated spaces of the classroom. They are reading and writing in limitless virtual spaces every day, and most participants use their social media accounts 50 to 100 times a day on average. That

means that 50 to 100 times a day minimum social media users are presented with opportunities to consume pictures, videos, tweets, articles, and texts, and have to think through how they want to present themselves with their actions and words online. They are frequently making choices about the content that they should post or the pictures that they should take, and I would argue that virtual self-presentation is a 21st century literacy that these students excel in.

Chapter 1 explained how schools perpetuate limited notions of literacy that are bound to pencil and paper and that these overly simplistic notions of literacy should continue to be challenged. Elizabeth Clark's (2010) "intentional pedagogy of digital rhetoric" (p. 27) that encompasses citizenship, ownership, teamwork, and interactivity amongst its students was examined, and data from this study show that this could be what education needs in the 21st century; participants' proficiency with literacy in the form of pictures, videos, tweets, and texts challenges traditional discourses on literacies.

The conversation on social media use is evolving to discuss how a social media user's choices are part of one's "social media literacy" (Goodman, 2014, para. 2). Online blogger Katlen Tillman (2010) explains that social media literacy is not just the knowledge of how to operate the mediums, rather it involves the "proficiency to communicate appropriately, responsibly, and to evaluate conversations critically within the realm of socially-based technologies" (para. 3); I would add that it also encompasses the artistic skillset of presenting the content through the medium. Professor Jeremy Lipschultz (2014) agrees and adds that "social media literacy begins in the schools with clear ideas about how to use technology to achieve specific

educational purposes” (para. 10). With the ways that communication is changing and evolving in the 21st century, it is clear that the hegemonic discourse on literacy needs to be challenged. Schools should be encouraged to move away from such literacy standardization as EQAO testing and into an understanding that literacy happens every day in the virtual spheres of student life, and perhaps we should be both teaching and assessing in those capacities.

#Implicationsforfutureresearch

The implications for further research are as follows. The first suggestion is in relation to gaps in the statistical research on youth and social media work. The second suggests qualitative research on students’ use of social media in the classroom and its effectiveness, while the third suggests future studies on a correlation between likes on photos and a user’s self-esteem. The last section calls for a closer examination of the relationship between taking pictures and social media users’ habitus.

Finding any relevant data on teens’ social media use to give context for this research was very difficult. The PEW Research Center just released a study in April of 2015 about teens and SNSs, but until then there were slim to no data available that examined what percentage of teens use social media, own a smart phone, or participate on the SNS Instagram. While the PEW study is helpful, it only targeted 1,060 teens living in the United States, and it would thus be interesting to gather data from Canadian teens to see if the trends in social media and Internet use are the same (Lenhart, 2015). As the data does show that Instagram is the rising SNS, it could be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study with Canadian teens that tracked and monitored how teen SNS use trends and change, and if Instagram participation will

ever pass Facebook participation or if Instagram will be replaced by a newer SNS.

Having data that keep up with the current SNS practices of teenagers could be helpful to teachers so that they may include safe SNS practices in their classrooms.

On a similar note, it would be beneficial for the educational community to research the effectiveness of implementing social media in the classroom. Research has been done on the implementation of critical digital literacies in the classroom, and data show that this is an effective tool for teaching critical thinking to students (Moore & Grisham, 2015; Pandya & Pagdilao, 2015; Spanos & Sofos, 2014; Walsh & Simpson, 2014). However, not many studies have been done on the types of changes that occur within students' perceptions of social media, critical thinking skills, or levels of engagement when using social media to complete specific assignments while in class. It would be compelling to see if students experienced changes in their attitudes toward social media use after using SNSs in class, and if using a medium that the students are familiar with could help them engage with their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, students' participation could be monitored to see if using social media could help students stay focused and immersed in activity while in class. All of the participants thought that using social media in the class would be a great way to motivate students, and it would be beneficial to have concrete data on this area of study. I also think it would be advantageous to collect data from teachers on their own attitudes toward social media, digital literacy, and media literacy to get a realistic idea of how these topics are being approached in our education system.

Based on the data collected, it would also be noteworthy to further explore the impact that likes can have on a social media user's disposition. While the participants

suggested that likes made them all feel good about themselves, the exact relationship that likes have with how they perceive themselves is very vague. It could be that the like count on photos does not make the participants any more or any less happy about themselves, but that likes contribute to an overall desirable virtual image which this study has established that the users take pride in. Moreover, when the users do not get enough likes on the photo and express feelings of regret and unhappiness, it could be that the users are upset with their virtual social capital potential and not with their actual selves. As this was not the focus of the interview, the participants' responses could not be thoroughly interrogated, and this would be an engaging area to explore in future research.

This research also touched on the relationship between picture taking and the habitus, and collected data on how many pictures the participants take each day. It could be very useful for educators if future research examined the types of choices that participants make each time they stop and decide to take a picture as this would move us toward a thorough understanding of the types of decision-making involved. The participants and other heavy social media users are frequently making decisions about how they interpret the world around them, and picture taking is a new habit and hobby of the 21st century student that should be examined.

Concluding Remarks

If I were to summarize my research into three main ideas, I would start with how these data support that SNS use does not negatively impact today's youth. SNS use does have the potential to heighten already existing problems within students' socialization, but overall it is just another venue to which adolescence manifests

itself. I chose this topic as to ascertain a better idea on 21st century socialization, and after spending time with the participants and their data I can truthfully state that I am not worried about how students use SNSs today; however, I am quite worried about the lack of information on safe SNS use that is available to students in their classes.

The fact that students are not receiving any guidance on SNS use from their teachers is unacceptable, and is a second noteworthy point to emerge from these data. While I do not expect every single teacher to use social media in their classroom, I do expect teachers to acknowledge social media use with their students and ensure that students are using these mediums safely. Whether it is through initiating open conversations about social media with their students, or having SNS use embedded into curriculum content (e.g., math or science questions that relate to SNS use), these connections should be in schools and I have come to see this as non-negotiable.

I also see critical thinking as non-negotiable, however, participants openly admitted that they are not learning how to critically think at school and this frustrates them. Therefore a third idea to take away from the study is that students are aware of the systemic flaws in the education system, and that memorization and standardization have no place in a school's curriculum; these facets of education need to be replaced with activities that encourage critical thought. If students were given opportunities to think critically in the classroom then they would be able to think critically about their virtual identities and make the best possible choices when engaging in issues that shape their private and public life on SNSs.

The implications for practice section outlined how teachers can respond to these data and use social media to encourage critical thinking in their students;

however, this depends entirely on a teacher's willingness to embrace these "new" ideas and their motivation to improve classroom practice. Would the teachers of Gerald, Phoenix, Veronica, Blair, Michael, and Hermione be open to engaging their students on topics such as the best social media practices if presented with the relevant tools and appropriate information? Will these teachers ever initiate dialogues about social media with their students or strive to make critical real world connections in their teaching? Or alternatively, will they teach in this same way forever?

As I conclude this project I find that I have more questions for 21st century teachers than I do for 21st century students, and am stuck wondering what happens when teachers do not want to change the way they teach. How can we motivate teachers to update their practices to ensure that topics like social media use and other real world connections get covered in the classroom?

Throughout my time in postsecondary institutions I have come to realize how important a teacher's role is to society, and that this job is not something to be taken lightly. With this in mind, I feel as if we as a society need to raise our expectations when it comes to the caliber of teachers that we let shape the minds of students. Clearly there is a lot of ground that still needs to be covered in the classroom, and if we want our students to be critical thinkers then we need to ensure that all teachers in every school are critical thinkers themselves. In one year the Ontario College of Teachers certifies an average of 11,000 people, all of whom pass teachers college and fill out the appropriate documentation (Alphonso, Morrow, & Bradshaw, 2013). But does passing teachers college automatically mean that teacher candidates are critical thinkers? If it does not, then how can we ensure that all teachers are critical thinkers

who will actively seek professional development and be attentive to the new needs of 21st century students?

I hope my project can serve as a catalyst for thinking about socialization, pedagogy, literacy, and 21st century teachers. While I have my own answers to the questions posed above, I would rather leave them up to the reader to interpret and answer for him or herself. Thus, instead of answers I would like to conclude with the sagacious and provocative words of Robert Allen Zimmerman (Bob Dylan) (1964):

Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call. Don't stand at the doorway, don't block up the hall. For he who gets hurt will be he who has stalled, there's a battle outside and it's ragin'. It'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls, for the times they are a-changin'. (para. 3)

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about yourself, including your hobbies or interests.
2. How often do you use social media? If it's daily, how many times a day do you use social media? This includes how often you go online to look at the content on these websites.
3. Can you describe which social media websites you use and how you use them? Do you use them a lot?
4. How do you feel about social media?
5. Do you feel that the representation of yourself from your Instagram or Facebook profiles accurately represents who you are in real life? Why or why not?
6. A) How does your social media use i.e., your Facebook account or Instagram account, and thinking about your social media accounts influence the way that you behave in various social settings i.e., at school, at a friend's house, at restaurant, etc.? B) How does it influence the way your peers behave in these settings?
7. A) Are there people in your age group that act a certain way online and post in a certain way that is different from how they act in real life? B) If there are, what are some of the differences between how they are perceived online versus how they act in real life? Why do you think there are these differences?
8. Do your accounts and what you post influence the choices that you personally make in the real world? This can pertain to activities that you engage in, or how having access to social media influences your daily activities.
9. Do you feel that there is a relationship between social status, and the online status that your social media accounts have? Do your peers think that?
10. When you are sitting in the classroom and looking around the room, do you find that you are familiar with your peers' social media use, and are you informed about their life via their online social media use?
11. Do you ever use social media to work on projects for school? If yes, which sites do you use and how do you use them?
12. How do you think your schooling experience would be different if you and your age group did not use social media?
13. How many photos do you take a day?
14. Have you ever thought about how the things that you're learning in school compare or contrast to the demands of our new, digital world?
15. How do you feel about school? Have you always felt this way? Have personal technologies (like laptops, iPads, and cell phones) influenced how you think about your schooling experience?
16. What do you think you've learned from using social media?

Appendix B

Reflexive Researcher Journal—Sample Statement

Date: Monday, June 9th 2014

Title: Phone researching stations: Developing my views on cultural technological shifts

Entry:

I have just spent the past weekend at a music festival in the city and I must say that the “shift” that society has experienced in communicative technology has finally hit me - I had this “Eureka!” moment where I realized that we are absolutely at a point of no return when it comes to virtual identity, social media, and cell phone use in society... And I don’t think that’s a bad thing.

I’m used to people using their phones to take photos of activities as that’s been a reality for a while now; however, I’m not accustomed to cellphone recharging stations at every concert or event that I go to... I’m also not accustomed to needing to use a cell phone recharging station as a result of over-using my phone... But guess what? This weekend served as a catalyst for how I think about my own personal technology use as the festival’s phone recharging station was my absolute saving grace. My iPhone battery keeps getting worse and worse as the months go by, and if I weren’t able to charge my phone at the festival, I would have been out of luck with a dead phone and no way of finding my friends after the day was over.

Social media has created a culture where its users are *encouraged to share things*, and I’m starting to reflect on the ways in which I personally feel the need to use social media to share. I was taking photos of bands that I saw and was then sending those photos of bands to friends that weren’t there – and to tie it back to the issue of cell-phone battery – yes, that weighs heavily on battery life. I tried turning off my receiving signal/data for a while to save battery, tried not taking photos and videos, and even turned off my phone at one point - but none of those quick fixes lasted. I really wanted to capture bands and capture fun moments to share with my friends and to keep as memories, and I noticed that I was actually unhappy and a little annoyed when I couldn’t use my phone – since when did this behaviour start?

At any rate, the festival clearly anticipated that people would be on their phones thus they had phone recharging stations, and every time I went to use the recharging station (which was actually more than once) the place was packed! It seems that everyone needed to charge their phones! Society has now shifted to a point where *cell phone recharging stations are the new normal* and I’m watching this shift unfold before my eyes. What will be next? Will schools have phone recharging stations? Will classrooms?

Also, there were so many people taking videos through their Snap Chat and Instagram applications that I kept thinking about how they weren’t in the moment, but were rather experiencing the moment through their phones/personal tech. I now wonder – is this a bad thing? It’s basically the new normal, but are we missing out on the moment by experiencing things in this way?

We are just starting to live with social media, and there are so many subtle changes that are happening all the time because of it (i.e., businesses creating Facebook pages and hashtags, events adding phone recharging stations), so now I am wondering what will be next? What will be the next big change we see in society that results from social media use? Will I find out from my own research talking to teenagers?

Appendix C

Coding Sample

Category: 21st Century Schooling
Open Code: Frustration with school

Memo: All six participants expressed similar frustration with such facets of their educational experience as the content offered in their classes and/or the entire system of education.

Axial Codes (Causal Conditions)	Examples
Discontentment with curriculum content/classes Discontentment with entire system of education.	
1) Frustration with curriculum content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of real-world connections • “Outdated” content • Unprepared for digital age (Curriculum not preparing students for digital world) • Unsatisfactory use of technology by teacher • Unsatisfactory use of technology required for a project
2) Frustration with system of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorization (Schools’ reliance on memorization vs. understanding) • Complacency • Standardization • Learning styles • Other countries’ education systems
Additional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permitted classroom cell phone use (Teacher approved) • Unpermitted classroom cell phone use (Teacher does not approve/is unaware) • SNS use in the classroom (Experience & predictions)

Appendix D

Feedback for Interview Questions

The initial interview instrument was 10 questions, and this was sent to two peers who reviewed and critiqued the instrument. Their e-mail correspondence has been pasted below with a reflection on how their feedback was applied to the research instrument. Their feedback was used to create the final set of interview questions found in Appendix B. Both e-mails were used with permission and names were left out to ensure anonymity.

Hello Mary,

Your interview questions are pretty sound. I don't think you are "pushing any ideas" onto the participants. In terms of the wording, I wrote some suggestions into the document. I like the flow of the questions. I think you need to explain question 4 and 5 more (about their own and others' accounts), and perhaps include an example after the question to further explain that (using i.e., or e.g.'s). In those cases, you need to be clearer about what you're asking (these are complicated ideas). I wrote those suggestions into the document too.

I also caught one typo. But other than that things look good.

In this piece of feedback, auditor one states that he does not feel the questions contain a researcher bias, but suggests that the tool elucidate certain phrases like "social media accounts," "personal technologies," and "various social settings" to include specific examples of what these terms mean. This feedback was taken and applied to questions 6 and now 15 of the final version of the questions. Questions 6 and 7 were also broken up into two distinct parts following feedback from both auditors.

Mary,

I reviewed your interview instrument and attached a copy I made with "track changes" in this e-mail. I thought that the wording of some of your questions might be too complex for 13/14 year olds to understand, and as you'll see most of my suggestions are on simplifying the language. Remember - you want the questions to be as basic as possible. They're not supposed to be written for adults, they're to be written for teenagers and the wording shouldn't be fancy or frilly. Basically, just get to the point as soon as you can! :) Also, have you thought about asking them how they feel about the phenomena under scrutiny (social media)? An open-ended question like that towards the start of the interview could help them ease into talking about social media as opposed to going right into talking about their profiles. You've touched on a field that is very current, and this will be a great study.... I liked how you asked the participants about how they use their social media accounts when they are out with friends. I definitely think you will be able to collect some interesting data using the questions that you've created. Good luck with applying to the Research and Ethics Board. I don't think they will have a problem with these questions.

Take care,

Auditor two's feedback was mostly about the audience for the tool. While I had thought that the questions were worded in a simple way, her attention to detail forced me to reconsider the age range of the participants. Were the questions truly understandable for all participants that were, for example, in the lower years of high school? Auditor two showed me that the questions were not as "basic" as I perceived them to be. As I recorded in my researcher journal, this was the moment when I realized that this was not just a project for university, but that I was actually going to be talking to real students who might really not understand these abstract ideas of performativity and identity. Using her suggestions made in the document, I further refined each question so that it would be as straightforward as it could be. I also added the question of asking participants how they felt about social media, and that appears as question 4 in the final version of the tool.